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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Is This a Bonhoeffer Moment?

Most German Christians were complicit with Hitler's regime. Others resisted. Lessons for the American church.

PLUS:

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for us today?**

**The church and
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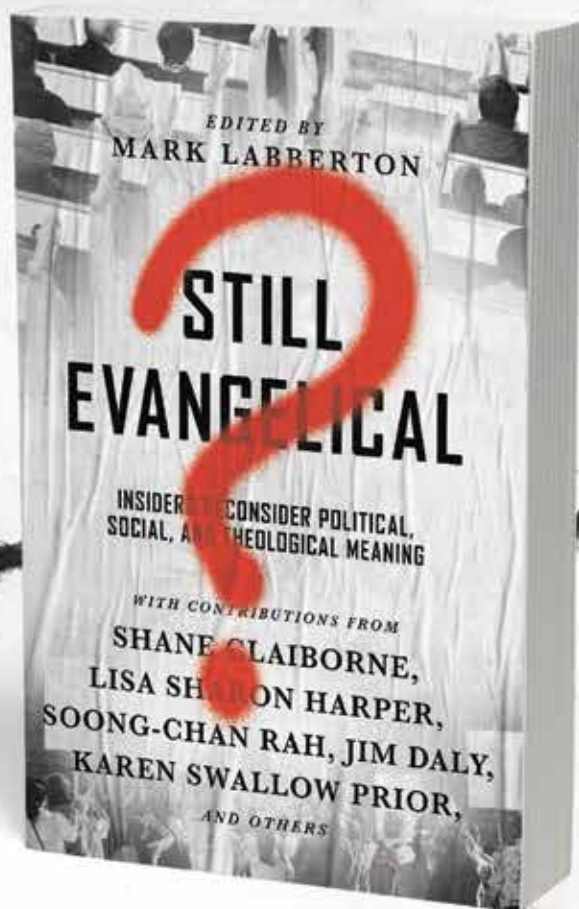


Dietrich
Bonhoeffer



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—**AARON GRAHAM**,

lead pastor, The District Church, Washington, DC

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**LOOKING FOR UNITY IN ALL
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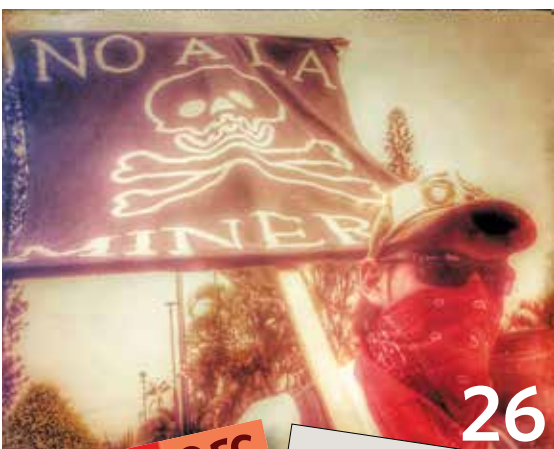
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THE PAGES OF this magazine rarely feature scathing reviews, but in 2011 we made an exception.

That year, in our February issue, we published Nancy Lukens' critique of *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*, by Eric Metaxas. Lukens, a German professor who translated many of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's works into English, described the book as "stunningly flawed," and lambasted Metaxas for trying to sculpt the 20th-century German pastor into an evangelical warrior on a crusade against liberal Christianity. Metaxas "does both Bonhoeffer and contemporary readers a gross disservice in implying that evangelicals are immune from the tragic error of

merging nationalistic fervor with Christian piety," wrote Lukens.

Fast forward seven years: Metaxas' Bonhoeffer biography boasts a bestseller sticker, and a resurgence of nationalistic fervor helped win Donald Trump the White House—and the explicit support of many white evangelical leaders, including Metaxas.

In this issue, we re-examine Bonhoeffer not as a caricatured hero, but as a complex figure who struggled to be a disciple of Jesus at a time when the loudest voices in the church swore allegiance to white nationalism. Our aim is not to draw simplistic comparisons



between Nazi-controlled Germany and the U.S. in 1938, but rather to "learn from historical figures and communities who came through periods of ethical challenge better than others,"

as scholars Lori Brandt Hale and Reggie Williams write in "Is This a Bonhoeffer Moment?"

And despite our differing contexts, we think this bespectacled German pastor still has much to teach us: "As much as the Christian would like to remain distant from political struggle," says Bonhoeffer, "even here the commandment of love urges the Christian to stand up for [their] neighbor." ■

Letters

Big Pharma's Malpractice

The article "Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?" (by Heidi Thompson, December 2017) is insightful. The opioid epidemic was caused by us. The United States continues to send jobs overseas, to our detriment, and Purdue Pharma's failure to publicize Oxycontin's addictive nature is an example of the malpractice in the pharmaceutical industry. We need to demand Congress to require that opioid-producing companies must pay for opioid addicts' recovery treatments. Communities need the ability to rebuild and establish sustainable jobs.

David Kleczek
Henderson, North Carolina

Hope Despite Heartbreak

"Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?" gave me hope and took a serious look at a problem. The news out of Ohio on this topic is so heartbreaking and alarming.

Trandice Ghajar Strausbaugh
Mililani Town, Hawaii

Contemporary Challenge

This is in response to "Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?" Thank you for shedding light on this contemporary challenge [of recovery from addiction]. Let's remember what Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you."

Bryan Guiot
Henderson, Nevada

As a parent of three children with substance-use disorder, I thank you for the light.

Thanks for the Light

In response to "Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?": As a parent of three children with substance-use disorder, I thank you for the light.

Sue Stromquist
Duluth, Minnesota

Suppressed History

Lisa Sharon Harper's column, "A History of Violence" (December 2017), is important. It invites us to learn how some of us live lives of privilege and are oblivious to the pain around us. It reminds us to seek out—and shine light on—every lingering, suppressed trace of this shameful history.

Michael O'Neill
Larimer County, Colorado

The Struggle Forward

What Lisa Sharon Harper describes in "A History of Violence" is true for Canada as well. Our churches are guilty of the genocide of First Nations people, through residential schools and ongoing systemic racism and injustice. We are struggling to find a new way forward.

Melissa Kullman
British Columbia, Canada

Morally Necessary

JoAnn Flett's article "How to Succeed in Business" (as told to Julie Polter, December 2017) is an absolute inspiration. I received an MBA more than 30 years ago, when my professors subscribed to Milton Friedman's theory of correct business practice: Simply and singly, maximize profits for the shareholders. If not, Friedman preached, no one will invest in business at all. This single-purposed criterion of success presupposed that shareholders (employees, consumers, suppliers, etc.) would benefit only if the owners knew they were receiving maximum returns. Flett's analysis of shareholder vs. stakeholder, and her position that it's possible and morally necessary to conduct business with the goal of enhancing the lives of all who are touched by that business, is most welcome to those of us who were taught otherwise.

Maggie Casciato
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Thumbs up! (Or down.) Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

The Heresy of Ideological Religion



DIETRICH BONHOEFFER was a young pastor and theologian in Germany during the rise of Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer founded an underground seminary, where he helped to lead what became known as the Confessing Church. His fundamental question was always, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”

There are never exact analogues in history. But there are questions and challenges from 1930s Germany that we should learn from today.

The Confessing Church and the Barmen Declaration, its statement of theological resistance to Nazism written mostly by theologian Karl Barth, were not simply expressing political opposition to Hitler and Nazism. Their objections were theological, and Hitler’s name was not even mentioned in the declaration.

Uncritical devotion to Trump by some conservative Christians calls to mind the complicit church in 1930s Germany.

The issue for them was discipleship to Christ, as opposed to the uncritical support that many church leaders were offering to Hitler, creating in effect a “state church.”

In the original German, Bonhoeffer’s classic work *The Cost of Discipleship* was simply called *Disciple*. That was the issue for Bonhoeffer, Barth, and the courageous members of the Confessing Church: how they needed to *disciple* their church members against the ideological religion that the German churches were being infected with by the political regime.

Perhaps the most blatant recent example of a “state church” mentality in relation to Donald Trump was a tweet by Franklin Graham. “Never in my lifetime,” the son of Billy Graham tweeted, “have we had a @POTUS

willing to take such a strong outspoken stand for the Christian faith like @realDonaldTrump. We need to get behind him with our prayers.” Such an uncritical, unprophetic, and ungodly devotion to such a deeply ethically compromised president does call to mind the complicit church in 1930s Germany.

Fox News is an important actor in the creation of a “state church” in this country. Pastors of more conservative churches often tell me, “It isn’t even fair—I have them for an hour each week on Sunday; Fox News has them the whole rest of the week.” Pastors can’t compete with the 24/7 ideology preached by Fox.

The Barmen Declaration was clear about the separation that must be maintained between the church and the state. “We reject the false doctrine,” the declaration said, that “the church ... should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the state, thus itself becoming an organ of the state.”

THE PRESIDENCY of Donald Trump has raised the question of whether this is a “Bonhoeffer moment.” This goes far beyond partisan politics—many conservatives and Republicans, along with liberals and Democrats, are raising questions about the moral and religious issues at stake in the presidency of Donald Trump. Here are some of them.

First, let’s start with truth, a central Christian concern. Many presidents lied when it served their political interests. In the Trump administration, lying has become persistent and pathological, occurring almost every day from the White House and the daily press briefing. No administration is ever happy with its press coverage, but the Trump administration’s regular attack on the media as “fake news” is a dangerous assault on freedom of the press and the First Amendment.

Second, there is racial bigotry, another central Christian concern. From Trump’s “birtherism” that questioned the identity of the first black president to his attacks on Mexican immigrants, from his Muslim bans to his appeals to the white nationalist base, Trump has used racial fear and hate to his political advantage. The racial divide in the church is creating what I call a “Corinthians crisis,” where one part of the body of Christ—Christians of color—is suffering while the white part of the body of Christ is not feeling their pain. And how we treat the stranger—immigrants and refugees, all the “others” who are put before us—is for us a matter of theological obedience, not political partisanship.

Third, Trump’s strongman style of leadership is a direct contradiction of the Christian ethic of servant leadership, and the civic ethic of public service, and points to the critical need for humility as well as checks and balances to restrain our political leaders.

Fourth, “America First” is a theological heresy. The body of Christ is the most racially and culturally diverse community on Earth—our connection to brothers and sisters all over the world makes our political convictions global, and not just national. And stewardship of the Earth, its resources and its people, is a priority for people of faith over an administration that shows no concern for God’s creation.

Regardless of whether special counsel Robert Mueller indicts Trump, whether Trump fires the special counsel to try to forestall the investigation, or whether Congress impeaches him, theological integrity more than political partisanship must govern the churches’ response. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

By Serene Jones

'A Terrorist War Against Women'

Male sexual violence is endemic, ongoing—and church-sanctioned.

THERE ARE MANY reasons why I find it difficult to turn on the news. Audacious and violent abuses of power are escalating; their grievous impact is mind-numbing. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the recent revelations of how sexual violence and harassment were regularly practiced, indeed normalized, by many men in high places of government and commerce.

It's hard to take in these stories, especially for women like myself who have suffered for years the ongoing traumatic effects of such violence. There is hardly a woman in this country who hasn't suffered some form of male sexual violence. When we hear such stories, most women and girls simultaneously relive their own horror stories. It's not a distanced, objective matter, blithely suited for early morning talk shows. We have painful flashbacks that bring with them a sense of dread, loss of voice, and overwhelming feelings of powerlessness. That's what

happens in the aftermath of traumatic sexual violence. It has the power to haunt you for a lifetime. Sadly, it is most acute when it is kept secret, or not acted upon when revealed. The majority of cases today fall

There is hardly a woman in this country who hasn't suffered some form of male sexual violence.

into these categories: Never making headlines, never redressed.

My own pain, however, does not outweigh my hope. I hope that each time such stories are told and positive action is taken, we chip away another small piece from the mammoth rock of male entitlement to women's bodies. My hope is matched, sadly, with a timeworn knowledge that cases will eventually drift from the headlines, that our

present-moment horror will likely turn again into everyday acceptance.

Perhaps we can resist this acceptance if we take this occasion to have more substantive discussions about sexual violence.

Those of us who have suffered its enduring harm need to be given the space and time to name it, hold people accountable, and begin the long journey toward healing. In a world riddled with this violence, no one can claim to stand outside of it. We are all implicated, albeit in vastly different ways.

AS A CHRISTIAN, I am reminded of the notion of universal sin, which our tradition tells us pervades all of life. It's an apt term to apply to male sexual violence: It names how some are guilty of perpetrating grave harms, while others bear the direct effects of this sin on their victimized, traumatized

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bodies and minds. Still others participate in the slothful sin of knowing what's happening but doing nothing.

The sin of sexual violence, and the vast web of harm it casts, must be addressed. I fear, however, that in too many churches the topic will be either be ignored or, worse, papered over by scripture pulled from here and there. When this happens—as it has for centuries—the church itself becomes tangled in a web of harm and the true Christian message of Jesus' commitment to justice for the harmed and marginalized is stifled.

How can we change this all-too-predictable course? We must stand by two fundamental truths: First, we must accept the simple fact that male sexual violence

is endemic, that this terrorist war against women is real, ongoing, and church-sanctioned. Second, we must believe with all we are that the God of Jesus, creator, lover, and protector of all life, rejects this violence as sin and evil and stands beside all those who suffer from it and who fight against it.

I pray that this struggle will one day achieve justice. And on that day, may headlines like the ones we see now be so anomalous that no woman flashes back to that awful moment when she herself was once prey. ■

Serene Jones is president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City and author of Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World.

By Aly Colón

Fake News in the Garden of Eden

News shapes our perceptions of society. Deception incarcerates us.

THE EXPLOSION OF “fake news” creates a conundrum for Christians: How do Christians determine what news is fake and what news is true?

Knowing the difference matters. It affects how Christians perceive the world. It helps them decide the impact news will have in their faith walk. It addresses their freedom to act upon what they believe is true.

Some, in the public at large, already believe they know what's fake and what's not. One national poll, for example, found that 46 percent of those contacted believe that major news organizations “fabricate stories” about the president and his administration. Another 37 percent didn't; 17 didn't know.

Why would such a high percentage of people think that news is made up when it involves the president? One reason: They don't believe any news that contradicts their view of the president. And why would the president label certain news fake? He doesn't agree with it, or believes his view is the only true one.

But what do people usually mean by “fake” vs. “true” news? Some believe that

“fake news” looks like “true news,” but it aims to deceive. For others, fake news represents anything that doesn't support what they already believe.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, “What you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are.” Where people stand today has created a divide when it comes to the veracity of the news media. That signifies an alarming development. The stakes for news consumers rise higher with each passing day. To some, it seems like there's a plethora of

news and a scarcity of truth. It becomes a cacophony, noise without context.

But fake news isn't new. If we want to use the story of the garden of Eden as one early example, the serpent offered his version of fake news. The serpent told the woman that if she ate the fruit of the tree, “You will not die” (Genesis 3:4). Fake news has been with us ever since.

What is new today involves the combination of sophisticated technology, pinpoint distribution of narrowcast information, and a divided society that seeks to imbibe only

46 percent believe that major news organizations “fabricate stories.”

From the Archives

February 1981

Filipino Justice

WHAT WOULD

it take for martial law to be lifted and a genuine democracy to be instituted in the Philippines? The obvious barrier to democracy is the economic stranglehold foreign corporations have on the country and the control the U.S. government exercises through its military and economic aid and military bases. ...

The national foreign debt of the Philippines approaches \$11 billion and continues to mount. The country must keep producing Barbie dolls and planting pineapples and bananas on prime land to raise enough foreign exchange to pay the interest on its foreign debt. A University of the Philippines Law Center study estimates that for every dollar invested in the country, three to four are taken out. People's real wages in comparison to the costs of living continue to shrink. ...

As I traveled around the Philippines people told me countless times, "President Marcos would not be in power one day longer if he did not have the political, military, and economic support of your [U.S.] government." ... If we understand the economic realities in the Philippines and the part that U.S. corporations, military, and government play in them, we will not rejoice at a name change or slip into supporting any other single person who may have more humane rhetoric than President Marcos, but who will also rely on the army and U.S. support to maintain power. ■

Dorothy Friesen was a former church worker in the Philippines when this article appeared.



what fits its own bias. Fake news taps into that.

So what's a Christian to do? Christians must put the news to the test. Here are some questions to help determine if a news source seeks truth and operates in an ethical fashion:

- What's the source of the news?
- Does the news source have a history of accuracy and accountability?
- Does the news organization provide credible and verifiable information?
- Does the story cite multiple and varied sources?
- Does the story quote identifiable sources? If anonymous, do they seem credible?
- How does the news distributed by one news organization compare to other news sources—similar and different?

By Michaela Bruzzese

Beyond Teaching Tolerance

Anti-Semitic incidents in schools have more than doubled; our curricula must respond.

IN THE 2016 ELECTION, white Catholics and evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump and the Republican party's "pro-life" platform. Since Trump's election, the United States has also seen an unprecedented rise in hate speech and action, such as the Charlottesville rally, and other incidents aimed at minorities, immigrants, and Jews.

The Anti-Defamation League reports a 67 percent rise in anti-Semitic attacks in the U.S. over 2016; anti-Semitic incidents in K-12 private, public, and parochial schools have more than doubled, including harassment, vandalism, and physical assault. These trends are the very opposite of the pro-life platform white Catholics and evangelicals held as a centerpiece for their voting choices.

The challenge of how to respond to a rising tide of hate is not a new one for Christians—nor is the complicity of churches in spreading it. While individuals and a few churches confronted hate speech and actions against Jews in the years of Nazi power in Germany, most supported

- Does the news provider seem to seek a fuller version of truth you can trust?

As news consumers, we must try to verify that the news we follow is accurate and true. We need to understand biases. We must search for context.

When Jesus spoke to those who came to hear him teach on the Mount of Olives, he said: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

The kind of person we are determines what we believe, and how we live. News is important because it shapes our perceptions of society. Deception incarcerates us. Truth sets us free. ■

Aly Colón is the John S. and James L. Knight Professor of Media Ethics at Washington and Lee University in Virginia and has worked as a journalist for more than 30 years.



Anti-Defamation League

the state. If we hope to do better today, we must educate our students not only about the end result of complicity and silence—genocide—but also about the stages of bias and hatred that are fertile ground for brutal, systemic violence.

To this end, the Anti-Defamation

League has developed educational resources that empower teachers to teach the Holocaust for what it was—one horrific chapter in hundreds of years of anti-Semitism (rejection of the Jewish people) and anti-Judaism (rejection of the Jewish religion)—much of it tolerated and promoted by Christians. The ADL offers web-based teaching tools, including lesson plans designed specifically to help students recognize the early-warning signs of dangerous discriminatory behavior.

One such tool is the “pyramid of hate,” which shows biased behaviors growing in complexity from bottom to top. I use this tool in my Catholic high school theology classes to assist students in analyzing the rhetoric and actions around controversial topics, such as immigration, Black Lives Matter, and white supremacist activity. The pyramid of hate shows how violence against targeted groups begins with apparently benign acts, such as belittling jokes. Once this bias becomes culturally accepted, it can escalate: from bullying and slurs to discriminatory legislation and bias-motivated violence, all the way to genocide.

One tremendous gift of teaching in the language of faith, as I do, is the opportunity to push students to strive beyond the pyramid of hate. For that reason, we also use a “pyramid of love” in my classroom. Not only do students learn to identify and challenge hate, they learn constructive engagement for building a just society, using the tenets of their faith. The pyramid of love shows how small acts, such as inclusion, can build to acceptance and defense of dignity, then to alliances and solidarity with vulnerable populations, culminating with the “beloved community” or reign of God. Beyond teaching tolerance, we are finding ways to teach love.

As Christians, we have an obligation to teach students the truth about the ways our faith has been used in the past to justify prejudice, rejection, discrimination, violence, and oppression. If we don’t, they will be incapable of recognizing and fighting against the ways our faith is still misused today. ■

Michaela Bruzzese, a Sojourners contributing writer, teaches theology at St. Pius X High School in Albuquerque, N.M.

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VIDEO



J.P. Keenan

Our Overdue Prayer for Survivors

It's hard to find the words. In the past few months, allegations of sexual assault and harassment committed by men in power—including men who profess to be Christians—have dominated our headlines. Yet almost two-thirds (65 percent) of pastors say they speak once a year or less about sexual and domestic violence, with 1 in 10 never addressing it at all. In response, Sojourners women and girls campaign associate Jenna Barnett wrote a prayer asking for “forgiveness for any time we assumed this violent sin doesn’t happen among Christians.” Listen at sojo.net/survivors.

QUOTED

“We are asking for more coverage, and for more attention aimed at an issue that is largely ignored by our society and the church.”

—**Kaitlin Curtice**
on violence against
Native Americans
sojo.net/curtice

NEWS



Securing Real Change?

Following the horrific shooting at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, many churches offered trainings to help congregants recognize potential threats and practice safely evacuating spaces of worship. “These types of solutions recognize the reality of the risk without compromising the nature of what a church is created to be,” said disaster ministry expert Jamie D. Aten.

“But in the aftermath of the Texas church shooting, I’ve struggled in discussions about church preparedness tools,” continued Aten. “Increasing church security will help save additional lives—but as long as a mass shooter is able to approach our church doors with an assault rifle or similarly modified weapon, we will have failed to fully prepare.”

“Preparedness isn’t just about being ready to respond when the worst happens,” he says. “It’s about doing what we can to try to reduce the likelihood of the worst from happening at all. There are a number of measures that experts and public opinion agree would address the underlying causes that lead to recurring gun violence. These include tighter background checks and restrictions on gun sales, expanded mental health treatment, and bans on certain high-capacity and semiautomatic weapons.

“Until sensible gun laws like these are passed, I’m afraid our preparedness efforts will more often than not resemble trying to fight a house fire with a garden hose.”

Read more at sojo.net/security.

Reuters

Anxious to talk about racism? You're not alone.

Wait, we're talking about what?

What if I say the wrong thing? I'm not racist, am I?

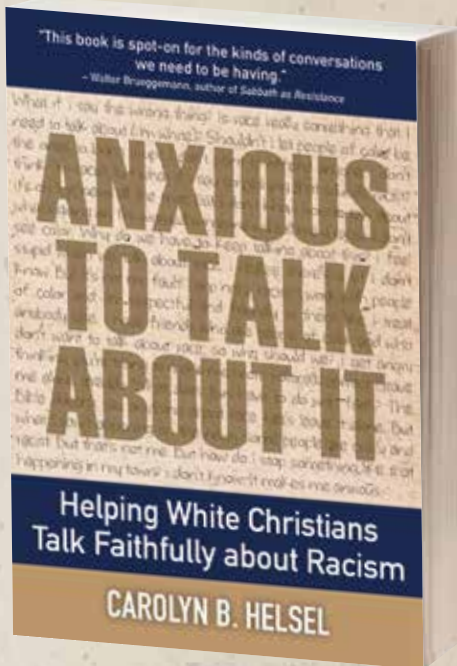
In this new resource for individuals and churches, professor and pastor Carolyn Helsel draws on her successful experience with white congregations to embrace and explore the anxiety often surrounding conversations about racism. Through the sharing of powerful personal stories, racial identity insights, and spiritual practices to help engage racial justice concerns prayerfully, you'll learn to work through your anxiety and join the important conversations faithfully.

Is race really something that I need to talk about?

But what's happening on the news isn't me.

**Free Study Guide
and Video Introduction
Available Online**

I don't know.
It makes me anxious.



More Books for Dismantling Racism

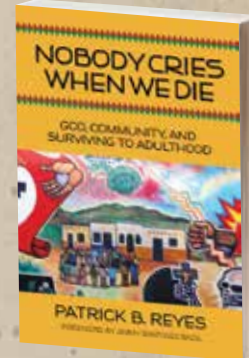
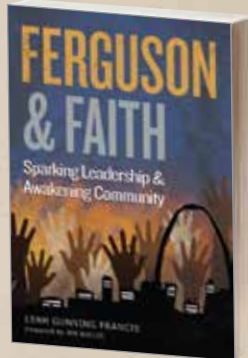


Coming 2018

A new book by Terrell Carter on navigating the Church through historic racial divides.



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Is Gentrification the Problem?

TO LOOK AT HIM, you know he's lived a hard life. With ridges creasing his 27-year-old face, my cousin Shack looked me in the eye during a family gathering and helped me understand how hopeless he feels. The people in his Newark, N.J. neighborhood are being pushed out of their community. The Whole Foods and condos that are moving in are raising the costs of rent and food. The neighborhood's old guard can't keep up.

This is the case in almost every city across the country.

In my own neighborhood—Petworth in Washington, D.C.—I have watched condos rise around me and Starbucks and small bistros move in over the last six years. When I moved here in 2011, taxi drivers and community veterans told me that, until recently, they considered Petworth one of the most dangerous and impoverished neighborhoods in D.C. Gutted by the violent uprising in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, the adjacent neighborhood Columbia Heights lay abandoned by city ser-



From Austin for Sale

displacement of often-poorer people by more affluent people that usually goes with it. These neighborhoods should have been repaired and developed decades ago according to the desires of their homeowners and residents.

African-American communities didn't want to lay fallow. No one wanted to walk through blocks of decaying buildings, navigating drug dealers and gang members. No one wanted to travel far to get healthy fresh fruits and vegetables. Black neighborhoods were starved of resources, repair, sanitation services, businesses, jobs—starved to death.

In the throes of death, they survived by creating alternative economies, under the table businesses, some legal and some illegal. There is no legal recourse when someone is wronged in illegal trade, thus violent action often becomes the alternative to courts, juries, and law enforcement. It was not uncommon to hear gunshots outside my window during the first two years I lived in Petworth.

What stops the cycle? Investment in black people and the infrastructure of their communities. Investment in their local businesses and health, as well as a renunciation of the structural lie that 1930s segregationists embedded in this country's land value system through the Federal

Housing Administration's mortgage policy. In its earliest years, the policy laid the groundwork for the present-day belief that black neighborhoods are less worthwhile than white ones.

For the black community in Petworth, one of the turning points in our season of disparity was the redevelopment of our local supermarket. Watching black families stream into the local market, which was full of fresh vegetables and fruit, was beautiful. And seeing how the market added jobs to the local economy was powerful.

Development does not have to be the death of black neighborhoods. The presence of Starbucks should not mean our demise. We like good coffee, too; we just need the means to buy it. We need jobs. We need businesses to hire people from the community. We need books in our schools and stop signs on our streets. And we need the U.S. government to take responsibility for how it ravaged our communities.

Our nation's collective view of blackness must be corrected.

For we, too, are made in the image of God. We, too, are called by God, created with the capacity to steward and cultivate the world. *Poverty* is the problem, not development. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of *The Very Good Gospel*, is founder and president of *FreedomRoad.us*.



These neighborhoods should have been repaired and developed decades ago.

vices and industry, and given over to poverty and violence, for more than three decades. When the city decided to develop Columbia Heights, it was only a matter of time before they would do the same to Petworth.

"But gentrification is not the problem," Shack said. "Poverty is the problem."

I heard those words and I wanted to push back. The anti-poverty advocate in me wanted to say, "Get with the program, cuz. Gentrification is the devil." But Shack had a point, a good one. Obviously, repair and development of the neighborhood isn't the problem—it's the

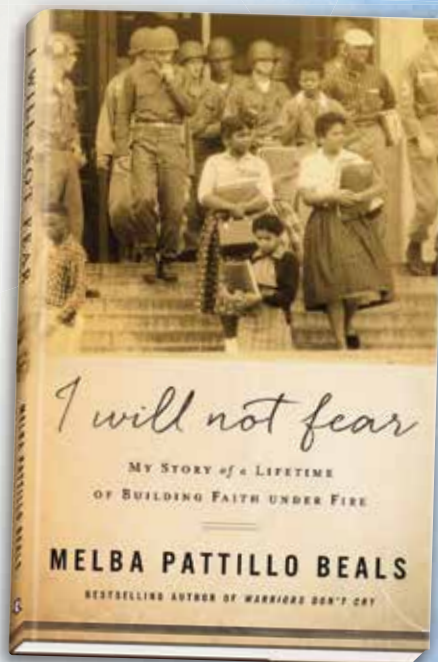
Lessons in **UNSHAKEABLE FAITH** *from One of the* **LITTLE ROCK NINE**

In 1957, Melba Beals was one of the nine African American students chosen to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. But her story of overcoming didn't start—or end—there.

In *I Will Not Fear*, she offers the encouraging and inspiring account of how her faith in God sustained her during her darkest days and helped her become a civil rights warrior, an NBC television news reporter, a magazine writer, a professor, a wife, and a mother.



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Is This a Bonhoeffer Moment?

**Lessons for American Christians
from the Confessing Church in Germany.**

by **LORI BRANDT HALE**
and **REGGIE L. WILLIAMS**

illustration by
MICAH KANDROS

Are we in a “Bonhoeffer moment” today? It is common to wonder what we would have done if we lived in history’s most challenging times. Christians often find moral guidance in the laboratory of history—which is to say that we learn from historical figures and communities who came through periods of ethical challenge better than others. Christians who wish to discern faithfulness to Christ often look back to learn how others were able to determine faithful discipleship when their contemporaries could not.

With this in mind, Dietrich Bonhoeffer may help us out today.

Bonhoeffer was a German theologian and pastor who resisted his government when he recognized, very early and very clearly, the dangers of Hitler’s regime. His first warning about the dangers of a leader who makes an idol of himself came in a radio address delivered in February 1933, just two days after Hitler took office.

Despite an abiding Christ-centered peace ethic, a desire to study nonviolent political resistance with Gandhi, and extensive writing about loving one’s enemies, Bonhoeffer eventually became a member of a conspiracy that was responsible for a coup attempt against Hitler. Twelve years after he became one of the first voices in Germany to offer public opposition to the Nazis, Bonhoeffer was executed by them, as a traitor.

By Bonhoeffer’s own account, he and his co-conspirators were living in a time and place in which “the huge masquerade of evil has thrown all ethical concepts into confusion” and in which evil appears in the “form of light, good deeds, historical necessity, [and] social justice.” They were living in a time that required a radical form of ethical discernment, attuned to concrete reality, historical urgency, and the desperate cries of help from victims of the state.

Throughout his life, Bonhoeffer developed theological themes that made social interaction the point of departure for understanding Christian faithfulness. He emphasized redemptive suffering in solidarity with the most vulnerable as well as what he called “costly grace,” and he made a distinction between religion and Christ-centeredness; religion is our effort to reach God while Christ-centeredness embraces God’s self-revelation to the world in the incarnation and in the church. In his final years, Bonhoeffer emphasized Christ-centeredness as religionless, or *this-worldly*, Christianity.

These are themes that qualify him as one of Martin Luther’s “theologians of the cross”; that is, people—like Bonhoeffer—who join God in the world, in solidarity with those who suffer, and who make difficult, even

countercultural decisions, especially in times when evil is disguised as good.

Perpetrators, bystanders, and resisters

We live in a time of moral obscurity. Communities and large demographic groups in this country are divided, both literally and ideologically, by competing truth claims that produce conflict and confusion. The current administration promotes these divisions. In fact, Donald Trump’s bid for the presidency centered on a declaration of building a wall, on the racial scapegoating of Mexicans and Muslims, on messages of ableism and misogyny, and on the denigration of African Americans by employing images of the “iconic ghetto,” as Elijah Anderson put it, especially in his references to violence in Chicago.

His “Make America Great Again” nationalism seeks to close the borders and recover some idealized picture of what America supposedly used to be, a picture steeped in white supremacy and the misguided ideology of “separate but equal.” Disturbingly, large numbers of white evangelical Christians share in this longing for Mayberry.

Since taking office, Trump and his administration have worked to enact a ban on Muslims, severely limited the number of refugees who can enter the country,

jeopardized the safety of transgendered individuals serving in the military, declared some members of the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups who rallied in Virginia to be “very fine,” and turned a blind eye to police brutality and racial profiling while demonizing those peacefully protesting it. And this list is not even close to exhaustive. Moreover, the administration has acted, and continues to act, with the explicit support of many (primarily) white Christians, and the complicity of many more.

Drawing historical analogies is difficult, even perilous, work, but Bonhoeffer’s context—specifically the church context within Nazi Germany—provides a helpful lens for reflecting on our current situation. As in so many other moments in history, there were perpetrators, bystanders, and resisters to the Nazis, as David Gushee explains in *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*.

Hitler fanned the flames of white nationalism in Germany by exalting the Aryan as the image of the idealized German and the future of humanity. This image offered hope for an idealized German community populated with an idealized Aryan *Herrenrasse* (master race). It was core to the rhetoric of overcoming the problems plaguing Germany after the catastrophe of World War I. The Germans were devastated financially and required, by the victorious Allies at the post-war Versailles peace conference, to accept sole guilt and shame for the war; this idealized picture of the Aryan master race was their



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Violence
is not the
answer.
That’s not
even the right
question.



key to saving civilization and making Germany great again.

Hitler and his supporters wasted no time in starting the work necessary to enliven this vision, including scapegoating and eventually trying to exterminate all Jews in Europe. The Nazis were **perpetrators**.

Hitler pledged to make the Catholic Church in Germany, as well as the much more populated Protestant churches, the “cornerstone of the work of national revival,” according to Thomas Bokenkotter in *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*. While the German Protestant churches were far from unified in their support for Nazism, officials of the Catholic Church made an agreement with the new German government in 1933, a concordat between Hitler’s Reich and the Vatican. It gave the church space to carry out its sacred affairs without government intrusion, and offered financial and political support in return, so long as the church pledged loyalty to the Reich.

In signing this agreement, the Catholic Church, collectively, became a **bystander**, complicit in the horrors of the Nazi regime. (In 1998, Pope John Paul II finally issued a formal apology for the failure of the Catholic Church to take action against the Nazis and in support of the Jewish and other victims of the Holocaust.)

A large segment of the Protestant churches in Germany, known as *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians), became more than bystanders. Their explicit support of Hitler and National Socialist ideology, and its influence on their theology, made them perpetrators. They supported the rampant white nationalism of the Nazis and its extermination attempt against the Jews. They pledged loyalty to the Nazi government, making no distinction between the Führer’s authority over the government and the church. On Sunday mornings, the pews of the German Christian churches were filled with Nazi officers, SS guards, and concentration camp doctors.

Jamming the spokes: The resisters

In opposition to the German Christians, the Confessing Church movement was animated by pastors and church members who rejected Hitler as a figure of church authority. They believed certain matters to be of such importance as to be considered a *status confessionis*—that is, a situation in which only one position is in accord with the confession of Christ.

Bonhoeffer was a member of the Confessing Church movement. While many members of this movement emphasized the separation of church and state as a *status confessionis*, Bonhoeffer was more radical than his peers. He saw Nazi racism in this light, as a Christian problem, a *status confessionis*, and a defining moment for the church. His thinking on this point is explicit in his 1933 essay “The Church and the Jewish Question,” which he wrote in response to the government adoption of the so-called Aryan paragraph, which restricted those with Jewish heritage from holding public office.

A long history of Lutheran understandings of church and state authority underlie Bonhoeffer's essay; his support of the Jews was not simply based on a humanitarian ideal. Something confessional was at stake for him, though, in the end, his work in solidarity with and on behalf of others had humanitarian, theological, and political implications.

In that 1933 essay, Bonhoeffer wrote that the church has the right and responsibility to ask whether the state is fulfilling its duty to preserve justice and order. He wrote that the church has the right and responsibility to aid victims of the state, even if they are not Christians. And, most famously, he wrote that the church has the right and responsibility to jam the spokes of the wheel of the state if it is creating too much or too little law. Jamming the spokes, he wrote, "is not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself. Such an action would be direct political action on the part of the church."

A year later, Karl Barth served as the primary author of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, also known as the Barmen Confession, offering affirmative doctrinal statements, condemning the distorted German Christian versions of those statements, and establishing the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer welcomed the declaration in continued support for the resistance movement. But his more radical stance moved him beyond the internal dispute about who had authority in the church. Although Bonhoeffer had a stake in this internal dispute, his resistance was more political and social, and driven by his theological commitments to Christ in concrete encounters with real human life.

Bonhoeffer's earliest theology, found in his dissertation, posits the idea that the ongoing incarnation of Christ happens in community; the church is "Christ existing as community." Not only does this idea contain the notion that social interaction is the point of departure for understanding Christian faithfulness, it means when I encounter another, I encounter Christ, and that *other* places an ethical demand on me.

Bonhoeffer's fellowship to Union Theological Seminary in New York in the 1930-31 academic year added social and racial sensitivities to that theological insight. Friendships with fellow students, including French pacifist Jean Lasserre and African American Albert Fisher, offered conversations and lived experiences that shaped Bonhoeffer's thinking in socially and politically radical ways.

After returning to Germany, Bonhoeffer co-authored a Lutheran catechism in which he declared that German "ethnic pride" was a sin. His reference to ethnic pride spoke to the German *Völkisch* tradition that the Nazis exploited with their white nationalist declarations of blood and soil. In the catechism, Bonhoeffer extended the conversation about race that

became familiar to him at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He quoted from Acts: "God has arranged it so that all races of humanity of the earth come from one blood" (17:26). White nationalism is an affront to this God-given reality.

In that same catechism Bonhoeffer argued, "As much as the Christian would like to remain distant from political struggle, nonetheless, even here the commandment of love urges the Christian to stand up for his neighbor." He continued, "His faith and love must know whether the dictates of the state may lead him against his conscience." He had no idea that he would soon be pressed to act upon this line of thought.

Who stands firm?

In a powerful 1943 essay of support to his friends and family working in the resistance, written 10 years after Hitler ascended to power, Bonhoeffer asked, "Who stands firm? Only the one whose ultimate standard is not his reason, his principles, conscience, freedom, or virtue; only the one who is prepared to sacrifice all of these when, in faith and in relationship to God alone, he is called to obedient and responsible action. Such a person is the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God's question and call."

It may seem strange to consider the need to give up one's reason, principles, conscience, or virtue to act responsibly, but he was living in a complicated time when evil was disguised as good.

One of Bonhoeffer's most important theological ideas might shed additional light; it is his understanding of *Stellvertretung*, or vicarious representative action. Christians understand the death of Christ as a vicarious act on behalf of humanity. Bonhoeffer says that to be disciples of Christ, to follow after Christ, we are called to act vicariously on behalf of others.

This idea has both a theological component and a moral one. In other words, it is not limited to the work of a Christian in the church community but refers to a



On Sunday mornings, the pews of the German Christian churches were filled with Nazi officers, SS guards, and concentration camp doctors.

For Additional Reading

- **The Bonhoeffer Reader**, by Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge (Fortress Press, 2013)
- **"Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Political Resistance in Tyrannical Times,"** by Lori Brandt Hale, in *Radical Lutherans/Lutheran Radicals* (Wipf and Stock, 2017)
- **Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians**, by Stephen Haynes and Lori Brandt Hale (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)
- **For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler**, by Victoria Barnett (Oxford University Press, 1992)
- **Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, by Christiane Tietz, trans. by Victoria J. Barnett (Fortress Press, 2016)
- **Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance**, by Reggie L. Williams (Baylor University Press, 2014)



way of being and acting in the world that is applicable to all people; it is a way of living that defines one's humanity. In a beautiful twist on the classical theological dictum that God became human so that humans might become divine, Bonhoeffer argues that God became human so that humans could become *truly human*, and humane.

In Bonhoeffer's case, acting on behalf of the neighbor took the form of protecting his Jewish neighbors from suffering and dying in concentration camps. And that required him to work, conspiratorially, toward a regime change, as a double agent and traitor to the state. But this work would not have been necessary if Christians had seen the evil of white nationalism and anti-Semitism as antithetical to their faith. Nazis gained power with Christian support.

Finally, we must be careful as we look to Bonhoeffer for guidance. Invoking his resistance, especially his role in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler, can lead to nefarious conclusions, if we are not careful to do the arduous work of discernment that pays attention to his context and our own. For example, Dr. George Tiller was an abortion provider who was murdered by an anti-abortion activist in 2009. Tiller's murderer modeled his action after a distorted interpretation of Bonhoeffer's legacy.

Some who ask the question "Is this a Bonhoeffer moment?" are asking just that: Is this a time that calls for violence? Violence is not the answer. But even to ask that question is to miss the point of Bonhoeffer's witness and signals one's inability to hear the deep truth his life conveys. It is the wrong question.

Bonhoeffer's life and work and death require us, especially Christians, to ask: Who is Christ for us today? That is a question that honors Bonhoeffer's legacy.

It forces us to ask ourselves if we recognize Christ in the other. Do we recognize Christ in everyone othered by political structures in ways that push minoritized people to the margins and crush them against walls? Do we acknowledge that God has made from one blood all people that dwell on the Earth? Are we attempting to make ourselves into "good people," defined by our weekly Sunday morning communities, ones that draw the boundaries of our social responsibilities quite narrowly, or are we looking to serve the Christ we meet in social encounters with real humans every day?

Bonhoeffer's life and work and death require the church to ask these questions. In the midst of this current political maelstrom, do you individually or collectively want to be a perpetrator, bystander, or resister? Everything is at stake. ■

Lori Brandt Hale is associate professor of religion at Augsburg University in Minneapolis and co-author of *Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians*. **Reggie L. Williams** is associate professor of Christian ethics at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and author of *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance*.

Who Is Jesus for Us Today?

Our confession of faith sometimes means resisting secular authority.

This is such a time • by WESLEY GRANBERG-MICHAELSON

The forces shaping, and misshaping, the world today include chauvinistic nationalism, growing economic inequality, deeply embedded misogyny, destabilizing climate change, unprecedented forced migration, and increasing militarization and violence.

Crucial to our response to all this, however, is a fundamental question: Are we confronted today simply by another set of vexing economic and social developments that require our attention? Or is something deeper at stake? Are we facing forces that constitute a spiritual assault on the integrity and truth of Christian faith in today's world? Is this a time when our response, however well intended, will be inept unless it is grounded in a spiritual resilience that confesses faith in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit, who unmasks and defies powers that would subdue and crush the public integrity of the gospel in the world?

This is, in truth, the crucial question for us to discern. And it is deeply serious. I'd pose it this way: When rising forces of nationalistic exclusivism are fueled by racial bigotry, when a naked global struggle for money and power shreds bonds of human solidarity, and when unbridled greed threatens planetary survival, is the truth and integrity of our faith at stake? Is the only response capable of addressing the roots of this crisis one of spiritual resistance and renewal rooted in what it means to confess Jesus Christ as Lord? In other words, is it a *kairos* moment calling us to a clear discernment of what it means, in this present context, to confess our faith? And must such a confession then shape the communities of those who believe the gospel? In my view, the answer is yes.

When a seminary becomes a threat

The most cogent historical lessons for framing the church's mission and witness in this time might be found in the soil and history of Germany where, of course, were birthed

the passion, faith, and truth that propelled the Protestant Reformation. We recall the courage it took at Wittenberg to confess God's Word and Truth in the face of a prevailing system whose corruption seemed matched only by its unassailable power.

But also significant is the story of Finkenwalde. This city lies on the east side of the Oder River. Today it's in Poland, and named Zdroje. But before 1945 this was part of Germany, and Finkenwalde was a suburb of Stettin. It was here, in 1935, that Dietrich Bonhoeffer founded an underground seminary of the Confessing Church.

An heir of the Reformation, Bonhoeffer struggled to discern the shape and character of the church's mission and witness in the context where he found himself, during the rise of the Third Reich. He witnessed a nationalism that was becoming chauvin-



istic and exclusive, contaminated by racial pride and exploiting economic grievances through bigotry and rejection of those who were different. Political and economic power were married and harnessed to obstruct dissent and reinforce a mindset of cultural superiority in the name of rectifying national grievances.

In all this Bonhoeffer and others saw the established church as deeply complicit, functioning with inexplicable comfort toward this emerging order, whose values so clearly violated the message of the gospel. The conflict intensified as the National Socialist government moved to establish direct control over the "German church." This led to the Barmen Declaration, drafted primarily by Karl Barth and adopted in 1934, laying the theological foundation for establishing the Confessing Church, with the leadership of Martin Niemöller and other German pastors.

Are we confronted today simply by another set of vexing economic and social problems? Or is something deeper at stake?

Bonhoeffer, center right, with other students at the underground seminary he founded in Finkenwalde.



Bonhoeffer, second from right, with fellow prisoners and the commandant of Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he was later hanged.

Bonhoeffer went to Finkenwalde in 1935 to start an underground seminary that would train pastors to serve in the Confessing Church. He perceived that established Christianity in Germany was failing the test of that time. It did not produce the depth of discipleship, the strength of commitment, nor the spiritual foundation deep and resilient enough to offer the witness that was required to face the fearsome idolatries propagated by an emerging evil empire.

In response, life together at Finkenwalde focused on building a Christian community capable of nurturing Christian faith that understood the cost of discipleship and nurtured the means for its practice. Students were encouraged to dwell in the Word, rest in prayer, support one another, and turn in solidarity to those most vulnerable in society. Bonhoeffer sought to create a Christian community capable of instilling and forming a depth of faith capable of resisting the onslaught of evil he saw arising in his country's life.

In 1937, the Gestapo shut down the underground seminary at Finkenwalde and arrested many of its students. Apparently, the authorities recognized the threat posed by those who simply read the Bible and prayed about the nature of God's mission in the specific context of their time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer continually asked this question: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" That question, asked at any time and accompanied by a clear discernment of the times, will undermine the power and authority of any regime intent on imposing a reign based on the prerogatives of privilege, race, wealth, and might.



Faith with the power to confront

It is also our question at this *kairos* moment as we discern the shape of God's unfolding mission in today's world and our participation in this work of the Spirit. Asking this question drives us, like those at Finkenwalde, to seek those practices and form those communities whose life and work embody a faith with the power to confront and overturn the idolatries of this era. That rests on a resonant and fresh confession of our faith and propels us to embrace those ways of discipleship that can sustain our witness in the long run.

This requires far more than the right words. We know that words matter. But the danger is to believe that once we say it correctly, and get the words planted in our heads, then our hearts will automatically follow, shaping our lives.

Reading Bonhoeffer In Our Times

by **VICTORIA J. BARNETT**

It requires more than the persuasion of well-crafted words analyzing our present context and commending action to prompt participation in God's mission in such a time as this. This takes the unfettered allegiance of people's hearts and the formation of their lives of discipleship. Countless pernicious forces press in the opposite direction, lulling the church back into complicit comfort, condoning narrow, nationalistic loyalties, offering the subtle idols of personal success and material reward, and promoting forms of spiritual escapism. It takes spiritual resistance, nurtured in communities of faithful disciples, to confront and overcome those forces. That was Bonhoeffer's lesson at Finkenwalde and should be our own today.

I am not maintaining a simplistic parallel between



the rise of the Third Reich and Adolf Hitler's attempts to directly suppress and subvert the church with political realities faced today. Times and contexts are different. But the similarities of forceful appeals to nationalistic chauvinism, racial bigotry, and cultural exclusivism as manipulative reactions to economic anxieties, particularly in the United States and Europe, are chilling.

What is parallel between that time and this, for all of world Christianity, is the call to freshly confess faith in ways that shape the church and form disciples with enduring capacity for the spiritual resistance, renewal, and transformation required for this moment in the world's history.

Our response to God's mission has its roots in communities of discipleship, expressions of the body of Christ in local congregations. It is here, in the congregations where you and I worship, that the shape of the gospel is to be seen and understood, in flesh and blood,

Continued on Page 24

One must be cautious about drawing simplistic historical analogies. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of comparisons to Nazi Germany, its leaders, and the Holocaust. The period between 1933 and 1945 was characterized by a complex constellation of factors, many of them unique to Europe during the first half of the 20th century. Nationalism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and populism have played a role in different historical periods and national contexts. Moreover, the language of grievance and resentment is usually homegrown, drawing upon the embedded prejudices and fears of a particular society as well as its hopes, which often are articulated in themes revived from the particular history of the host nation.

At such moments the responses of citizens and their institutions are crucial. Political culture is not just the product of how citizens engage in and create their society. It is also an expression of what we are willing to tolerate, what compromises we make, and the reasons why we make them—and those are the factors that can undermine and even destroy a political culture.

The veneer of ethics and moral behavior in the public square can be surprisingly thin. Human beings are easily swayed and enraptured; peer pressure and crowd behavior are powerful forces. We are used to living by a particular set of rules, values, and expectations of behavior, individually and socially, and it is often easier for institutions such as the civil service, universities, businesses, and religious bodies to conform than to resist. When the rules change it can be difficult to find our bearings, let alone chart a new course that can address and if necessary challenge what is happening around us.

These are the themes that Dietrich Bonhoeffer addressed in his writings. His context was Nazi Germany, but his observations about what happens to human decency and courage when a political culture disintegrates continue to resonate around the world today. ■

Victoria J. Barnett was a general editor of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works series by Fortress Press. This is adapted with permission from "After Ten Years": Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Our Times, © 2017 Fortress Press.

The veneer of ethics and moral behavior in the public square can be surprisingly thin.



Continued from Page 23

by others. That's why it is said that "the local congregation is the hermeneutic of the gospel."

People don't just want to hear about faith. They want to see what it looks like in the communities of men and women who claim and are claimed by this faith. When participation in God's mission is placed at the heart of a congregation's life, the living God renews and transforms us. Yet God's mission is never something that the church confines and controls.

Thousands of congregations are struggling with the call to respond faithfully to the pernicious forces shaping so much of our world. But that can't be done in isolation. Just as individual members cannot live independently from others in a local church, congregations cannot thrive in their witness if they are isolated from others.

Could we imagine ways that take seriously congregational journeys in vastly different regions and situations that all strive for costly and faithful engagement in God's mission? Could we connect such congregations in a virtual electronic community, sharing and networking together, and answering from their own contexts the question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

From frenzied activity to building community

The church today faces the challenge of embarking on a pilgrimage, a journey from the necessity of words to the formation of lives, from the announcement of our declarations to the pronouncement of our discipleship, and from the frenzy of our activity to the building of Christian community.

This pilgrimage poses these questions along the way: Are we ready to live into our identity as a *communio*, expecting that we are covenanted together as communities of faithful discipleship obedient to the *kairos* nature of this time? Can we truly place our commitment to join in the movement of God's mission at the center of the church's life and identity? Are we willing to direct the church's material and spiritual resources toward learning from the practices at Finkenwalde and all the places like that today?

Can we nurture the formation of Christian faith in communities of missional discipleship that can stand the test of this time? And can this compel us to participate courageously and joyfully in God's reconciling and redeeming mission in the world? That is the pathway for the living God to renew and transform us. ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, former general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, is author of *From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church*. This article is adapted from his address to the general council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in July 2017.



Like a Good Neighbor

A SPORTING GOODS store in a nearby town announced last week that it was closing, after many years of operation. Here's why I think that matters, even amid all the rest.

Yes, we are living through a terrible moment in American (and planetary) history. Almost every day features two things: More cruel tweeting from the president, and more unsettling data from the real world. It is a bizarre and disheartening mix: record meanness and crudity, record windspeeds and temperatures.

We must resist, of course, and we are: The ongoing mobilization of people of good conscience is the one sweet thing about these past months. We look toward, among other things,

have no relationship with their next-door neighbors, which is a novel situation for humans. But in the next 50 years, we're going to need our neighbors again. The fat years are past and the lean years are upon us—even as we try to rebuild our planet against the predations of the rich and powerful, we're going to require stronger communities for sheer survival. Ask the people trying to recover from Hurricane Harvey, from Maria, from the firestorm that raked California.

WHICH IS ONE reason we can't keep sending our money off to Amazon. When we do, in search of a few dollars savings or a few minutes convenience, we further wreck the local economies that somehow survived the predations of Walmart.

This second wave of local business destruction is even sadder than the first: One could argue that poor people had no choice but to frequent Walmart, but Amazon's demographic is different. It's almost by definition people with a choice.

No one ever met a new friend at Amazon. They may have read a thousand comments about some product at the bottom of a webpage, but

that's different.

Being a good consumer is not what we need at the moment—what we need are good neighbors. People who will buy somewhat fewer items if that lets them shop locally. People who will spend the few minutes it takes to run an errand, rather than the few minutes it takes to log on, and then to check Twitter, and then to check Facebook, and then to ...

This may not seem like a grand gesture, one that can make a difference. And indeed it's not as important, in the short run, as turning out voters for the next election, or rounding up protesters for the next march. But it *does* matter. People regularly ask me where they should go to survive climate change, and people regularly ask themselves where they should go to survive the new scary politics that haunts our lives. The answer, for those who can't manage a move to New Zealand, is: anyplace with a strong community.

Good neighbors are the answer to many questions, so we should make sure we are. ■

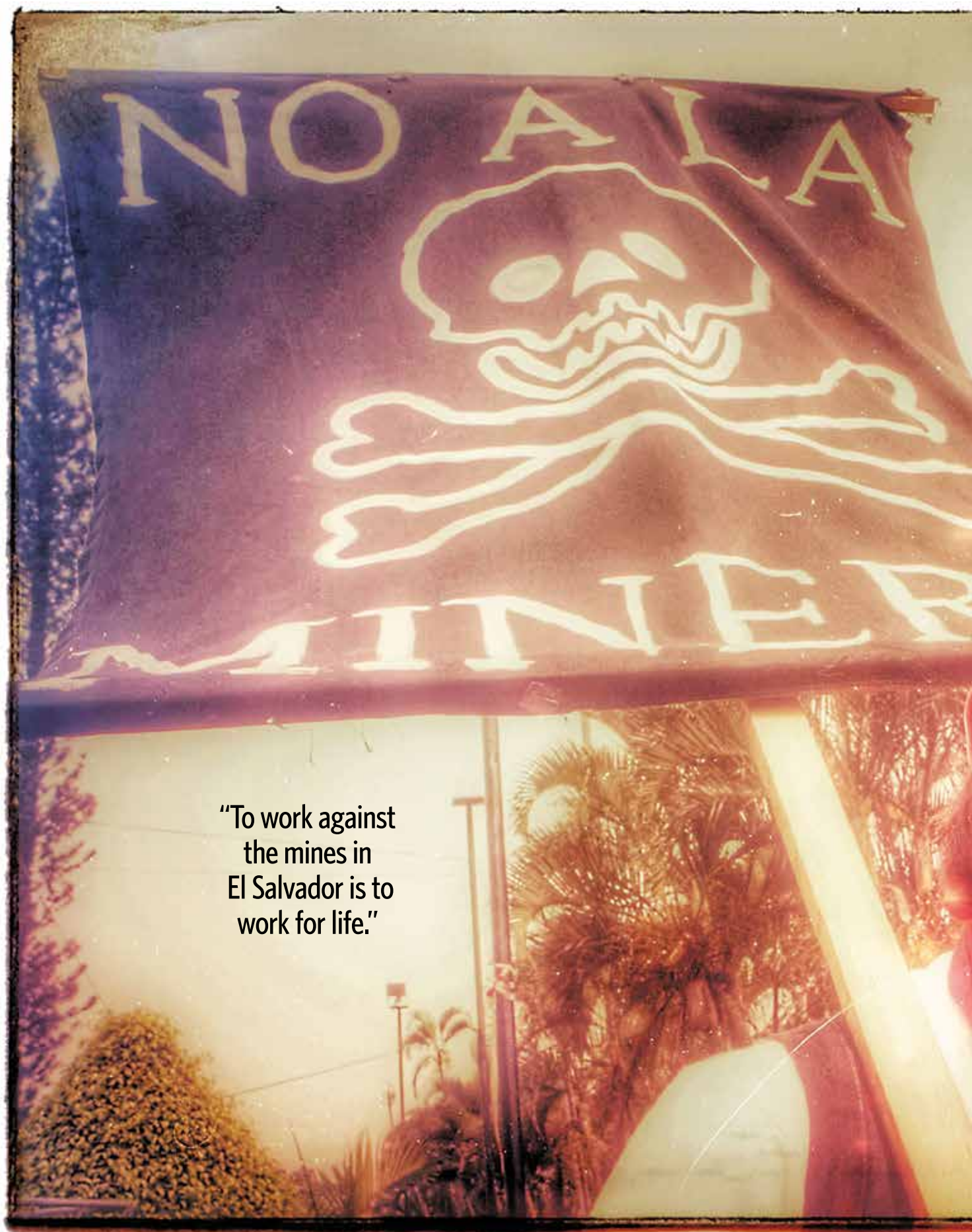
Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



No one ever met a new friend at Amazon.

the midterm elections as a moment when we might start to pull out of the nosedive. But resistance will not, even at its most successful, entirely erase our problems anytime soon. Long before Trump we were facing impossible inequality and impossible ice-melt. Along with resistance, we need ... neighbors.

Neighbors were optional for much of the last 50 years. We became hyper-individualists—surveys show that three-quarters of Americans



"To work against
the mines in
El Salvador is to
work for life."



'Yes to Life, No to Mining'

Last spring, El Salvador banned the mining of gold and other metals—thanks in no small part to the work of the Catholic Church.

by **JEFF ABBOTT**

LAST APRIL, El Salvador became the first country in the world to ban the mining of gold and other metals. The action grew out of a decades-long struggle to protect access to clean water and prevent pollution caused by mining projects.

The Catholic Church played a central role in the movement to end mining, which organized under the slogan *Si a la vida, no a la minería* ("Yes to life, no to mining!"). An encyclical from Pope Francis provided inspiration, and San Salvador's archbishop called on legislators to pass the anti-mining law, which the church was integral in writing. For many, it called to mind the actions of Archbishop Óscar Romero in El Salvador's civil war decades before.

'To work for the mines is to work for death'

Beneath the jungles and mountains that stretch from southern Mexico to Nicaragua lie untold mineral riches. Over the last two decades, transnational companies, drawn by the lack of regulation and the promise of huge profits, have sought to exploit these resources. But the rise of the extractive industries has triggered intense social conflicts, environmental destruction, and violence throughout the region.

A demonstrator
protests mining
in El Salvador.

elsalvadorsolidarity.org

Clergy, including José Luis Escobar Alas, Archbishop of San Salvador, center, and Franciscan Domingo Solís, right, helped lead protests against mining.



"The owners [of the mines] present themselves as grand industrialists with great technology," said Domingo Solís, a 62-year-old Franciscan, in his office at San Antonio Church in San Salvador. "But they lack the recognition of the dignity of the people and other living beings—the plants and animals—in the areas where they are going to work. The object of the company is to take the gold and silver that is in the subsoil, at whatever cost. They come and offer work, technology, and development to the communities, in order to extract the gold, silver, or whatever metal there is. If they have to destroy a mountain, [they say] they must do it because the gold is below it."

The new millennium brought more interest from mining firms as the country ended its long civil war and began negotiating the Central American Free Trade Agreement in 2003. The year before, the government prepared a development plan for the northern region of El Salvador that relied heavily on natural-resource extraction. According to Pedro Cabezas, an independent investigator who works closely with the movement against mining, the national development plan directly impacted 20 percent of the country.

Transnational mining companies—such as the Canada-based Pacific Rim Mining Corporation and the Utah-based Martinique Mining Corporation—began investing in El Salvador mining projects. But this put El Salvador in a precarious position, according to Cabezas: Mining would exacerbate the country's fragile environmental issues, especially access to water.

"It is a small territory that is overpopulated and has a deforestation rate of 90 percent; the majority of the water sources were being contaminated," Cabezas said. "The presence of mining would accelerate the environmental crisis."

Faced with the threat of environmental destruction, communities across the country organized into a national movement to challenge mining interests. "This movement rose from the communities and brought together powerful actors from across the country," said Cabezas.

"To work against the mines in El

Salvador is to work for life; to work for the mines is to work for death," Solís said. "The mines destroy the forests, they rip apart the ecosystem, they contaminate the water, and they expel the people."

The resistance grows

Alejandro Guevara Velasco, a 68-year-old farmer from the northern region of El Salvador, has known no other world than that of working in the fields. He's been farming to produce maize, beans, and other crops since he was 7 years old.

"The campesino lives a very difficult and desperate life," Guevara Velasco said in the office of the Social and Economic Development Association, an organization

El Salvador's mining moratorium had a ripple effect around the world.

that has worked in the northern region of Cabañas since 1993. "All the land in this country was obtained by the land owners," Guevara Velasco explained. "This means we are forced to rent for everything. We live enslaved. They charge us whatever they wish, and they can do what they want with the lands. They can sell it if they wish."

In 2004, Guevara Velasco began to see strange men coming onto his land to collect soil samples. The men were from the Canadian mining company Pacific Rim, which had been given licenses for exploration in the area. The landowners impacted by the exploration, including Guevara Velasco, were never warned of the licenses. "They were going to begin excavating for gold under the nearby area without

informing the nearby campesinos, including me," explained Guevara Velasco. This need for information led to the earliest mobilizations of the community against Pacific Rim's El Dorado mine.

Guevara Velasco and others told the Social and Economic Development Association about the mining and asked for

help. David Pereira, a mining analyst in San Salvador, along with other investigators including Cabezas, began looking with the farmers at the impact of the gold mines in their region. They started by studying the longest operating mine in Salvadoran history—the San Sebastian mine owned by the Wisconsin-based Commerce Group. What they found was a legacy of contamination.

"In the 1980s, the residents said that they began to see a stream of yellowish liquid leaving the entrance of the mine, leading to the river San Sebastian," said Pereira. "This liquid is the acidic drainage of the mine. Today this stream has grown, and the river is utterly dead." The case of San Sebastian, and the stories coming in from movements against mining in Guatemala and Honduras, influenced other communities to organize against mining interests.

In 2007, the Catholic Church issued a formal proclamation against silver and gold mining,

signed by nine bishops and an archbishop. The statement identified mining's threats to communities, to agriculture, and to clean water. "For all of the above," wrote the bishops, "we affirm that, since the life of the human being is in danger, even if some economic benefits can be obtained, the mining of precious metals should not be allowed in El Salvador. No material advantage can be compared to the value of human life."

By 2008, numerous civil resistance actions and protests had occurred, influencing the national government to pressure the mining companies. That year, Salvadoran president Antonio Saca, of the right-wing ARENA party, stated that his government would not issue new mining permits. The following year, new Salvadoran president

Jeff Abbott



Mass protests in El Salvador helped create a mining moratorium that had global effects.

Reuters

Mauricio Funes, of the left-wing FMLN party, declared a national moratorium on all mining activities.

The moratorium unleashed new levels of brutal repression against grassroots organizers by paramilitaries. In June 2009, Marcelo Rivera, one of the key leaders of the movement, was kidnapped, tortured, and later found dead. In December 2009, Ramiro Rivera Gomez, Dora Alicia Recinos Sorto, and her unborn child were assassinated by paramilitaries in the San Sebastian region.

Guevara Velasco himself narrowly avoided an assassination attempt in 2013. “The grace of God was upon me,” Guevara Velasco said. “A dog came and attacked the man as he pointed his gun at me. It really scared me, but I will not allow them to intimidate me.”

The ban heard around the world

El Salvador’s mining moratorium had a ripple effect around the world, including lawsuits and countersuits. Pacific Rim (which was later purchased by the Australia-based OceanaGold) sued the government of El Salvador for \$250 million for violation of the Central America Free Trade Agreement. After seven years, in October 2016, the World Bank finally dismissed OceanaGold’s claim and ordered the corporation to pay El

Salvador \$8 million to cover legal costs.

The decision shocked observers—and added strength to the anti-mining movement in El Salvador and around the world.

“It was two giants against tiny El Salvador,” Solis said. “This decision really inspired the people. It gave them new force to continue to struggle against mining, and to struggle for a law banning mining.”

Riding this tide of enthusiasm, last February San Salvador’s Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas called on legislators to pass the anti-mining law, which members of the Jesuit-run University of Central America were instrumental in writing. Legislators said they would consider the law if the church was able to collect 10,000 signatures in eight days. The church gathered more than 30,000 signatures.

On March 9, thousands of supporters marched to the assembly building to present the signatures—including Archbishop Escobar Alas, leaders from the university and from Caritas, the coalition of Catholic aid agencies, as well as Solis. “The members of the legislative assembly said that they would have a decision by Holy Week,” said Solis. “And just days before Holy Week, they announced they had passed the law unanimously.”



The new law orders the Ministry of Economy to close existing mines, while prohibiting the government from issuing new mining licenses. It gives small-scale miners a two-year period to phase out production. The law does not apply to mining coal, salt, and other nonmetallic substances.

‘Our struggle will continue’

The mining issue has galvanized Catholics throughout the country and united the bishops. “We have to defend the rights of all people; as a church, we will always defend the right to life,” said Archbishop Escobar Alas.

Escobar Alas became archbishop of San Salvador in 2008, replacing the socially and politically conservative Fernando Saenz Lacalle, a member of Opus Dei. Escobar Alas was influenced by Pope Francis’ calls

for the defense of “our common home” in his 2015 encyclical and by other papal documents. For example, in a 2015 letter to residents of mining communities, Francis called for a “radical paradigm shift” in the mining sector and decried the “dramatic consequences of environmental degradation in the life of the poorest and the excluded.”

“We were supported and inspired by the entrance of Pope Francis,” said Solis, the Franciscan. “Specifically, the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. It is an excellent encyclical for awakening the awareness of people to the responsibility to protect the environment, that everything is interrelated, and that we need to take care of our common home.”

The victory in the World Bank court and the enactment of the world’s first national ban on metal mining does not mean that the struggle is over for the communities of El Salvador.

“This law will not protect us from mining,” said Guevara Velasco. “We have good laws, but the state and people may not be capable of fulfilling the law. Our struggle will continue.” ■

Jeff Abbott (@palabrasdeabajo) is an independent journalist based in Guatemala.



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Poetry

BY NICHOLAS SAMARAS

Instructions to the Monastic or the Pilgrim

Enter this room and call it a cell.
Fold yourself and put yourself away.
For your whole life, you will be an amateur.
But be an amateur striving.
Enter this room and call it vigilance.
Make your ego the threadbare rug you walk on.
Before your quiet face, hold
the fane of your folded hands.
Fold yourself and put yourself away.
Become the parent to your parents.
Cast their names on the wind of your breathing.
Enter this room and be alone with dialogue.
Take the name of silence and let it speak.
Come from your life and lay down your life.
Come from always, go away everywhere and nowhere.
Enter this room as the threshold of spirit.
Take the movement of stillness.
Approach stillness and hear every song of your adolescence.
Take every melody and still them all.
Stay vigilant through each black hour and learn
the language of the stars that are both absent and present.
Every peasant you meet will be God.
Every one of your exhalations
will become the name of God.
Take the name of God and breathe it in,
until each dying breath breathes God.
Take everything you have been.
Take everything you can become.
Take the name of this place as your name
and come from nowhere else again.

*Nicholas Samaras, poetry editor for
The Adirondack Review, lives in West
Nyack, N.Y.*



A Matter of Time

AS FAR AS WE know, Nov. 18, 1883, was the only day in history to have two noons. In a move to standardize haphazard railroad timetables, the United States was divided into time zones. Major cities wound their clocks to a newly designated “noon,” suddenly separated from their neighbors into zones of “now” and “not yet.”

Some newspapers and bulletins responded with humor. “We were not

Humans had harnessed a mysterious, elemental power, and bent it to their will. “Time reformers” became the pioneers of the future.

Now, 135 years later, some religion scholars point to the creation of standardized time zones as an inflection point in our society’s relationship with mechanical technology. In Boston, at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, a group of researchers recently presented their studies of the intersections of religion and technology in the United States. Capitalism, and its reliance on standardized time, seemed particularly nettlesome. “Does a clock have anything to do with religion?” asked Kati Curts, historian of religion at Sewanee: The University of the South.

Time has always played a role in religion—whether used as a marker of holy days and seasons, or as litanies calling faithful to prayer at marked times of day. But with mechanical technologies, time became a unit of measurement for production and consumption.

Efficiency and the movement of things replaced presence and the movement of the spirit as an organizing value. For the wealthiest Western nations, standardizing time has improved our economies, our communication,

and our quality of life.

Yet standardizing time has not answered our spiritual searches. (It sometimes confuses them even more—this year we celebrate Ash Wednesday on the same day as Valentine’s Day, a strange recipe for contemplating the nature of love.)

And the 1880s notion of “time reformers,” who championed reducing a universal, embodied experience to its most efficient, dis-embodied parts and reordering the world accordingly, echo much about our notions of “tech pioneers” today.

“Modern timekeeping did not simply emerge; it had to be imposed,” wrote Ian P. Beacock. “Technology changes the world not by its own Promethean logic but rather according to ours.”

Time in our own image is finite and always about to run out.

But with each other, and with the divine, we can find the wealth of communion. We can celebrate the lavish love we bestow on each other and simultaneously confront our impulse to destroy others made in the image of love. We do not have to be afraid of “spending” more time on one or the other. We are in no hurry. We have all the time in the world. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is deputy web editor at Sojourners.

“Does a clock have anything to do with religion?”

so far behind as [Maine], and therefore do not need so great an advance,” one Trenton, N.J. paper joked.

But this existentially momentous event was largely observed with pragmatism. “When the reader of THE TIMES consults his paper at 8 o’clock this morning at his breakfast table it will be ... 6 o’clock in Denver, Col. and 5 o’clock in San Francisco. That is the whole story in a nut-shell,” declared *The New York Times*. The slight change was necessary for standardization—time zones meant progress, efficiency, growth. Who could argue?

And so there was noon, and there was noon again, on that first day.

In the U.S., and soon around the world, time was domesticated.



IMPERIAL POWER

Empires—Roman and American—impact the physical and mental well-being of their inhabitants • by WARREN CARTER

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IS CONTROVERSIAL. Many people in the United States enjoy access to excellent health care, but high premiums and pre-existing conditions have eliminated coverage for others. Some politicians (privileged with extensive health-care coverage) have even made determined efforts to *deny* health-care access to nearly 30 million people. Their actions are like the response of elite allies and agents of Roman power to Jesus in Matthew's gospel, when Jesus healed people of various afflictions.

What's true today under American empire was also true under the Roman Empire: Acts of healing have political as well as spiritual ramifications. The attention that Matthew's gospel gives to Jesus' healings might point us to some best practices for health care today.

BIBLE STUDY



is bad for your health

People wait to enter the Remote Area Medical mobile clinic in Wise, Va. The annual event provides free medical care to thousands of uninsured and underinsured people in Appalachia.

Photo by Pete Marovich/American Reportage



The gospel, peopled with sick folks, mirrors the imperial world.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is always healing. The gospel alternates summaries of his general healing activity with details of specific healings.

Matthew 4 sets up the frame: "Jesus went throughout Galilee ... proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them" (23-24).

This summary is touched on eight other times in Matthew, surrounded by 14 individual healing scenes: a leper (8:1-4), a paralyzed slave (8:5-13), Peter's fevered mother-in-law (8:14), two demoniacs (8:28-34), a paralyzed man (9:2-8), a woman with a hemorrhage (9:20-22), a dead girl (9:23-26), two blind men (9:27-31), a deaf man who cannot speak (9:32-34), a man with a withered hand (12:9-14), a demoniac who cannot see or speak (12:22-24), a demon-possessed girl (15:21-28), a "moon-struck" demon-possessed boy (17:14-20), and two blind men (20:29-34).

What is the significance of these actions? What do they contribute to the gospel narrative of Jesus as the agent of God's saving reign/empire?

Don't over-spiritualize

Most explanations focus on Jesus—and thus risk decentering those who suffer and are healed. Some claim that the healings show Jesus to be divine, but the ability to heal does not make a person divine. Disciples are commissioned to heal and they are not constructed as divine (10:7-8). There were other healers in the Roman world about whom claims of divinity were not made.

Another interpretation is that healings show Jesus to be the Messiah/Christ. But this explanation is not convincing either. Among those who were looking for the Messiah, there wasn't a checklist of signs by which the Messiah could be identified. Healings do not equate with Messianic identity. Nor does the commissioning of disciples to heal and exorcize make them messiahs, just as it does not make other healers in the Roman world messiahs.

Another unsatisfactory but common approach is to spiritualize the healings. In part, Matthew's gospel encourages this approach. It employs both deafness and blindness as metaphors for those who do not perceive God's reign/empire to be manifested in Jesus' activity

(13:14-15). Many interpreters then read the healing scenes in the same metaphorical manner to claim them as moments of "insight" or comprehension. But there is no reason to subordinate all the summary and individual scenes of healing to these verses and read them as metaphors for gaining understanding. Jesus does not demand understanding before he heals; nor often does he require faith.

Unacceptable in these three interpretations is the indignity of turning the suffering and healed into visual aids that serve either Christological purposes in attesting Jesus' identity or discipleship/ecclesial purposes in highlighting faith, understanding, and obedience.

In those approaches, doctrinal or religious issues replace people and divert attention from the somatic and material transformations effected in their lives. Admittedly, the gospel encourages this erasure since the scenes often ignore the circumstances of suffering folks. But resisting readers can pause to imagine the "before-and-after" scenarios of transformed lives.

So how might we understand these healing scenes? Why are there so many sick folks in the gospel narrative? The answers emerge from focusing on the structures and systems of the Roman Empire. Much interpretation ignores this imperial context and pretends that the "religious" gospel text does not engage its sociopolitical, imperial world.

But the gospel, peopled with sick folks, mirrors the imperial world.

Empire sickens

The Roman world was hierarchical with vast societal inequalities, economic exploitation, and political oppression. The hierarchy comprised several layers of ruling elites with varying degrees of wealth, power, and status (perhaps 2 to 4 percent of the population) presided over by the emperor and very wealthy senators. A middling group with some resources enjoyed a comfortable way of life (perhaps 7 to 17 percent).

Three layers of the poor spanned those living near subsistence levels to those living below subsistence. These comprised some 80 to 90 percent of society. That is, most people lived with little power, wealth, or status—in varying degrees of poverty—seasonally cycling around, above, and below subsistence levels.

These folks, whether urban or rural dwellers, were vulnerable to numerous forces that could severely impact their livelihoods: work availability, variable harvest yields, high prices, profiteering, war, irregular food and water supply, low wages, unsanitary and crowded living conditions, housing costs, taxes, rents, natural disasters, and so forth.

In this imperial system, control of and access to good quantities of nutritionally adequate food reflected societal power and inequities. Food was a sign of elite, conspicuous consumption and power. Food insecurity, the norm for many, reflected a lack of power, wealth, and status, as well as the considerable vulnerability of many non-elites.

In theory, the Mediterranean diet—comprising mostly grains, beans, olives, and vine products—was reasonably healthy. But in practice, a lack of variety, poor nutritional quality, and variable supplies impacted by harvests, weather, poor transport and storage, seasonal variations, and limited purchasing power frequently resulted in diets of inadequate nutrition.

A consequence of inadequate nutrition is disease. Poor nutrition results in lowered immunity and renders people more vulnerable to infectious diseases such as diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, typhus, meningitis, and scarlet fever.

Along with diseases of infection were diseases of deficiency. Classicist Peter Garnsey links Vitamin A deficiency, for example, with blindness, bone deformation, growth retardation, and lowered immunity. Vitamin C deficiency retards development of bones and teeth, as well as contributes to scurvy. Vitamin D deficiency causes muscle weakness and limits bone growth. Garnsey observes that “for most people, life was a perpetual struggle for survival.”

In addition, congenital defects, injuries from accidents, poor hygiene systems, and a lack of knowledge about hygiene and medical care contributed to sick and disabled bodies.

Moreover, daily life was very stressful. Stress takes its toll on relationships and bodies, including decreased immunity. Studies have also linked psychosomatic illness and demon possession with imperial and oppressive contexts. Symptoms such as muteness and paralysis can indicate people overwhelmed by power, by the trauma of domination. They can also be coping mechanisms of disengagement and distancing or self-protective protests through inactivity and non-compliance.

A sure sign of the lethal quality of life in Rome’s empire was a short average life expectancy of around 20 to 25 years. For those who made it to age 10, there were perhaps another 35 years. Death rates were high. By one estimate, half of the infants who survived birth did not see their fifth birthday. Imperial power is bad for health.

It is not surprising, then, that Matthew’s gospel is peopled with sick folks.

God’s empire heals

The presence of so many sick people attests to the destructive impact of Roman power. Jesus’ healings repair damage inflicted by imperial structures and systems. They rolled back negative effects of imperial hierarchies and systems that privileged powerful elites. Jesus’ compassionate (Matthew 9:36) and merciful power (9:13, 12:7) confronts destructive imperial power. His healings expose the lie of imperial propaganda.



A young man waits for medical care at an annual free clinic in Wise, Va.

Numerous imperial sources claim that the Roman Empire was making the world healthy again. Augustus had, so it was said, launched a “golden age” marked by health and abundant fertility. But 100 years later, when Matthew’s gospel was written, the “golden age” had still not dawned.

The gospel interprets Jesus’ healing actions as manifestations and anticipations of God’s new world, marked by God’s life-giving purposes.

In Matthew 11:2-6, Jesus tells John’s disciples, “Go tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk.” Jesus explains his actions by referring to verses from the prophet Isaiah (26:19, 29:18-19, and 35:5-6).

These passages envision the establishment of God’s reign/empire that creates a world marked by bodily health and wholeness. Other passages, such as Isaiah 25:6-10, anticipate that this coming world will feature abundant food and the end of death, tears, and disgrace.

Matthew’s gospel aligns with other Jewish texts that envision a new age under God’s reign/empire that transforms the inequities of Rome’s world to establish an age of “abundance and healing” (2 Esdras 7:123). For example, “Health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish, and fear and tribulation and lamentation will pass away” (2 Baruch 73:2).

By citing Isaiah’s vision, Matthew’s Jesus indicates that his healings begin to manifest this new world in which God’s reign/empire prevails.

Jesus’ healings display God’s reign/empire

Continued on Page 43



The tree of all temptation: pleasure, love,



gambling, adventure, wealth...



But also the tree of all distress: death,



poverty,

Serge Bloch's
illustrations
from *In the
Beginning*



By Julie Polter

Let's Start at the Very **Beginning**

Sometimes the best antidote for the daily news is an ancient story.

IT HAS BEEN A TIME of shadows and warnings, bursts of violence and the creeping stain of betrayal. Falsehoods, at first a dripping faucet over a tin bucket—the hint of failing seals and valves, the promise of future corrosion—have become a downpour. Disintegration seems the rule.

Where to find a true story, one that endures?

Scripture might seem the logical turn for a Christian. But I know my weaknesses. Left to my own devices, I cherry-pick favorite verses, I swerve away from difficult passages. I rarely read anything in the Old Testament except the prophets—and those while too often presuming I stand with them, already on their side, and God's: Nothing for *me* to hear, except the echo of the woe and correction I'd like to dole out to others. A situational loss of hearing that is a sure path to perdition.

But then I was introduced to an unusual portal to the holy word, one that easily charmed its way past my conscious and unconscious scriptural biases: a 500-plus-page coffee-table book whose bronze cover is adorned with line drawings of people who are at

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Furious, Goliath bore down upon David, who got him right between the eyes with the very first stone. Done. See Goliath, now historic.

turns winsome and ominous. With title and highlights in fluorescent orange, the design is reminiscent of some DayGlo-kissed whimsy from the 1960s. *In the Beginning: Illustrated Stories from the Old Testament* (Chronicle Books) retells, through images and spare prose that is both fresh and respectful of the scriptural sources, core stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition, from creation and the Garden of Eden to Daniel in the lions' den. Created by French writer and biblical interpreter Frédéric Boyer and French illustrator Serge Bloch, and translated into English by American poet Cole Swensen, it is a profound work leavened by gentle playfulness.

In the Beginning (published in France in 2016 as *Bible—les récits fondateurs*) began not as a book but as 35 short animations

Boyer and Bloch created for the independent French Catholic publishing company Bayard. This is evident in the simple, energetic illustrations and concise narratives of the book. (The site bible-recits.com has links to 15 of the animated chapters on YouTube—they are engaging even if you cannot understand the French narration—and video interviews in French with Boyer, Bloch, theologians, and biblical scholars. Boyer also supervised a team of biblical scholars and contemporary writers for a French translation of the Bible published by Bayard in 2001.)

Serge Bloch is a prolific illustrator for newspapers, magazines, children's books, and animated series. His illustrations here are dominated by loosely drawn characters,

Memory is on our side— stories of the past help us know who we are.

with soft spot washes of color and texture. More detailed drawings, often of anachronistic objects—a brick wall, a throne, factory equipment, the Eiffel Tower (topping the tower of Babel)—are at times layered in. Bloch often employs Ralph Steadman-style ink blotches and distortion to emphasize the danger and chaos of apocalyptic visions or tales of earthly horror. Sex and violence are frequent themes, but the illustration style is not exploitative or explicit. Although this seems a book most fully meaningful to adults and teenagers, it is not inappropriate for mature children.

The 35 chapters pull substantially from the books of Genesis and Exodus, but also from other books with a clear narrative structure, including Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Job. But Boyer and Bloch also illuminate the Song of Songs, the Psalms, the poetry of the prophets Isaiah, and the strange visions of Ezekiel. The chapters each open with a title page and a blurb announcing what is to follow, often subtly wry. Chapter 27, for example, is "Isaiah's Visions or A Mysterious Liberator ... In which we learn of the events that followed the catastrophe of exile. And a prophet who sees what no one else wants

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New & Noteworthy



A Voice of Compassion

Artist and activist Mavis Staples speaks to the increasing social divide in her latest album, *If All I Was Was Black*. In this interracial and multigenerational project, Staples doesn't shy away from anger but, as always, her ultimate message is the promise of positive change. Anti- Records

Peacemaking with Purpose

Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart, co-founders of The Global Immersion Project, believe peacemaking practices should be grounded in Jesus' teachings. *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World* is full of stories, insights, and questions for discussion and shows what it means to live as a true global citizen. InterVarsity Press

More than an Education

Emmy-winning documentarian Stanley Nelson tells the story of historically black colleges and universities in "Tell Them We Are Rising." With commentary by historians, scholars, alumni, and current students, the documentary masterfully explores the impact of HBCUs in America, then and now. hbcuring.com

No Ordinary Time

Kaitlin B. Curtice, a Native American Christian writer, speaker, and worship leader, invites readers to explore what "glory" means in her book, *Glory Happening: Finding the Divine in Everyday Places*. Through stories and prayers, Curtice reveals that the divine can be encountered in the most ordinary of circumstances. Paraclete Press

When the Artist Is an Abuser

IN THE PAST couple of months, since the sex crime revelations about Hollywood kingpin Harvey Weinstein, a historic corner has been turned regarding the fact that some powerful men abuse and degrade the women around them. In fact, we're already talking about this as the post-Weinstein era.

But the wave of belated outrage that is just now cresting may have started building more than a year ago, with reports about Donald Trump's sordid record as a serial harasser, molester, and adulterer, a history confirmed, on the record, by no less than 20 women in the weeks before election day.

For reasons that have been pretty thoroughly rehearsed, in these pages and elsewhere, that wasn't enough to stop the Trump train. But the shock of Trump's victory must have done something to embolden the next wave of women to speak out,



Woody Allen plays a middle-aged man dating a girl (Mariel Hemingway) in *Manhattan*.

problem because that's where I first encountered it. I used to love Woody Allen. Starting with *Bananas*, I saw all his movies, and I thought they were hilarious. As I grew up, his self-obsessed nebbish character started to grate a bit. But still I had to recognize *Annie Hall* as a work of genius.

Then there was *Manhattan*. In that 1979 film, Allen, who was 44, played a middle-aged man involved in a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl played by the model Mariel Hemingway, who was really 16 during the filming and on-screen looked even younger. It gave me the creeps, and I started losing interest in Allen's career. When the 50-something Allen took up with the 35-years-younger Soon-Yi Previn, an adopted daughter of his longtime romantic partner, actress Mia Farrow, disinterest turned to deliberate avoidance.

So, given my Woody Allen problem, what am I going to do about Louis C.K. or Kevin Spacey or, for that matter, about Weinstein's productions, from *Shakespeare in Love* to *The Butler* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*? My reaction to Woody Allen was visceral. But I'm not sure I can defend it intellectually.

Flannery O'Connor, my surest guide on such matters, thought about this

from the opposite direction, as a Christian artist who refused to produce overtly religious work, and she insisted that the value of a work of art should be judged solely in terms of the demands of its discipline. The duty of the Christian fiction writer, she insisted, was to write great stories, nothing more and nothing less. Following that logic, the work of the immoral artist could also have its own independent value. Another of my favorites, novelist John Gardner, said much the same thing in his classic craft book, *The Art of Fiction*. "Some bad men," he asserted, "write good books, admittedly, but the reason is that when they're writing they're better men than when they beat their wives and children."

So, for now, I end up believing that the work of these abusive, exploitative, and narcissistic little men can still have real value, and should be considered apart from their lives. But only after they're dead. While they're still on the hoof, possibly trolling for new victims, they'll achieve their immortality without my patronage. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



What do we do with works of art made by men who do dark and despicable things?

at Fox News. And the example of Gretchen Carlson and Megyn Kelly must have made it easier for some of Weinstein's victims to speak. And after them, the deluge.

Since the Weinstein reports, Roy "Ten Commandments" Moore has been unmasked, Al Franken's predatory actions exposed, and more revelations about politicians and others are sure to come. But it's in Weinstein's Hollywood that the deepest rot has been exposed, and it's the Hollywood revelations that force us to think again about our relationship with works of art that may enrich our lives but were made, at least in part, by men who do dark and despicable things.

I think of it as the Woody Allen

Continued from Page 37

to see makes some alarming suggestions that no one wants to hear." The synopsis for Ezekiel begins: "In which a small man is exiled, his suitcase at his side." And the subtitle of Jonah is a special favorite: "The Sadness of a Minor Prophet."

At the end of the book, Boyer has written short essays that give some historical and interpretive context for each story.

I found myself disarmed by the ease and energy with which this book drew me in to reading the old, old stories and seeing them anew. But what about that gave me hope?

The briefest of introductions establishes the overarching narrative frame to the collection of stories. For the Israelites exiled in Babylon in 586 BCE, remembering who they had been as a people and the

Their core identity was rooted in the full sweep of history.

lessons not-quite-learned was a lifeline: "In exile, they remembered the one true God, a promise, and the wonders of earlier times. Words from the sky. A path through the sea. With these ancient stories, they would write their hope."

So, the devastation the exiles were experiencing was not to define them: Their core identity was rooted in the full sweep of history and a difficult but enduring relationship with an often confounding God. The implication being that in memory there is hope, in part because it reminds us that the choice to not accept the corruption of any given era is definitive for who we are and how we live. God places us in history, but also invites us to co-create the future.

Scriptural stories carry both past and promise, and crackle with the residual energy of a God who spoke us into being. Chapter 1 tells of creation, establishing the primacy and the creative/restorative potential of words as wielded and bequeathed to us by God: "How it all began we'll never know / But we have speech / And it is speech that started it all ... Everything is included in the word of God / God wanted



TO SEE AND BE SEEN

2017 WAS A YEAR of vulnerability at the movies, beginning with the Best Picture Oscar going to *Moonlight*, a film about the potential to heal broken masculinity through male tenderness, and ending with real life stories of how some men abuse power and all men need to take responsibility for changing masculine cultures of domination. Here are some of the films that meant the most to me this year and help to illuminate that onscreen journey.

First there was **Endless Poetry**, the 88-year-old Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky's biographical wonder, about a mother's love, a father's distance, an artist's emergence, and the wisdom of looking back and letting go.

Then, **Patti Cake\$**, where the future of America is bright, embodied by a white working-class woman who makes hip-hop out of her struggles, an Indian immigrant so selfless that Patti Cake\$'s success is what makes him happy, and an African-American street prophet raging against the machine, each falling into a community where flaws are loved.

Mother! was the most controversial film of the year: Before truth sets us free, it sometimes hurts. A lament for mistreating the Earth, which by dramatizing the burden of being the target of misogyny seeks to honor all women.

Just such a target is beautifully unfolded in my favorite performance

of the year, Sally Hawkins as **Maudie**, a Canadian artist of great soul and rigor, whose primitivist work allied itself to a wounded marriage.

The obstacles to getting by, and the absurd lives of those who face none, are keenly felt in **Beatriz at Dinner**, a film in which Salma Hayek's working-class massage therapist and John Lithgow's money monster spar, making the point that killing is easy, but healing is hard. Why not try healing?

Healing is indeed hard, or at least takes time. The journey is no more beautifully expressed than in **A Ghost Story**, in which a lost spirit takes centuries to make peace with himself.

At least another 20 movies elevated or challenged me to live better this past year—among them *Dunkirk*, *Okja*, *War for the Planet of the Apes*, *The Lost City of Z*, *Brigsby Bear*, and *The Big Sick*. But I'll end with the film I most want you to see. It's a piece of crafted nonfiction about an elderly artist-activist and her young friend embarked on a similar path, called **Faces Places**. It invites everyone to do just one thing: Slow down when we are looking—at each other, at the world, at ourselves. Behind our vulnerability, there are divine secrets. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



weariness,



war,



exile...



One day at the foot of the tree, there was a snake, sleek and naked, and he liked teasing them.



Eat this, and you'll be completely different. You won't die, but it will open your eyes.



You'll see it all otherwise. The garden. And everything that lives here. The sky...



Eat this and you'll be surprised, he said.



The temptation was too strong. Eve took one of the fruits. Adam wanted some too.



She gave him half.



Suddenly, they were afraid of the lion.



Suddenly, they were afraid of the spider, and the trees, and the clouds...



They ran and hid in the garden.



They wanted cover and dared not look at each other.



And the snake turned mean. He was clearly not their friend.



Then they heard a voice in the garden. God called out to Adam: Where are you?



I heard you in the garden, and I got scared; I'm naked, and I went to hide.

there to be something rather than nothing."

But these ancient stories are, like the daily news, often filled with the worst of humanity—rape, murder, massacres, betrayals. God sometimes forgives and restores, but also punishes or seems capricious. How does *this* engender hope?

I turn to the other key element Boyer points to, in the midst of these texts of terror and the terrible: forgiveness. That is, God's repeated desire, despite God's own latent anger-management issues and homicidal

God places us in history, but also invites us to co-create the future.

tendencies, to grant pardon to humanity (who needs it again and again). And from that, the forgiveness that is possible between people. Tender thematic sprouts appear here and there, often after some narrative conflagration, as when God asks a sad and angry Jonah, "Why allow endless darkness to defeat forgiveness?" The title page of the final chapter, which is drawn from the book of Daniel, hints that forgiveness is bound up with our ultimate destination, noting that it is a tale "in which the end of time is announced along with the end of idols and errors, a time given over to pardon."

Memory is on our side—the stories of the past help us know who we are. But *In the Beginning* also testifies that people of faith are heirs to the dynamic, ongoing story of creation, the inherent hope in being a living, forgivable, and—if we choose—forgiving part of "something rather than nothing."

Lies and ideologies-made-idols are the misappropriation and misrepresentation of reality. They make us want to cry out in frustration: "Is nothing sacred?" But the quiet thrum beneath the all that is all is that *everything was meant to be sacred*. We were made for better than this. As we open to that possibility, to God's holy syntax (The "sound of silence," Boyer writes in reference to Elijah. "A sound as soft as dust."), we might know and live more of what is true. ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of Sojourners magazine.

Reviewed by Courtney Hall Lee

WHERE THE SPIRIT CALLS

And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Stories from the Byways of American Women and Religion, by Adrian Shirk. Counterpoint Press.

I RECENTLY attended a conference at Princeton Theological Seminary called “Telling Our Stories: Breaking the Mold, Taking Risks, Paving the Way.” Immersing myself in a group of women of faith remembering their trailblazing predecessors and sharing their faith journeys was particularly synchronistic as I was reading Adrian Shirk’s well-received volume *And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Stories from the Byways of American Women and Religion*.

Shirk’s work is refreshing and compelling in both its unique structure and earnest voice. The book is a delightful hybrid of creative, narrative chapters featuring a diverse array of historical women intertwined with Shirk’s own spiritual memoir. In both instances, Shirk captures a voice that is insightful, sharp, and unlike anyone else’s I’ve read.

The book has a wondrous quality, as it weaves alongside the free spirits of its subjects—women who embraced alternative, and sometimes subversive, spiritual outlooks in the face of the patriarchal, Christian American religious landscape. The author describes the tension between her draw to nonconformist spiritual interests and her American, Judeo-Christian culture. Shirk writes:

Meanwhile, my instinct toward the magical, the occult, the feminist ran up against my participation in various patriarchal churches: During the years of Witch Night, I found myself attending a nondenominational church plant, the liberal synod of the Lutheran church, and a Catholic Newman Center (though without a Confirmation, the Catholics had refused me the most magical of the Mass’s gifts).

Shirk examines the beliefs of groundbreaking female pioneers such as Mary Baker Eddy, who founded Christian Science; writer Flannery O’Connor, whose work was significantly impacted by her Catholic spirituality; and Sojourner Truth, whose prophetic voice of inclusion and spirit-filled Christianity endures today. She also spends

time with less familiar figures such as New Orleans’ Marie Laveau, whose Voodoo practices were revered by a racially mixed milieu of people during the early 19th century.

An addition, Shirk shares her own experiences through sections of memoir and family narrative. She shines a light on the origin story of her own faith by looking at the history of her eccentric family members. One particularly compelling chapter is lovingly written about the author’s aunt, who lives on remote Block Island, R.I., and wrote fan mail to a favorite writer for many years, with a surprising result.

One of the most valuable aspects of *And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* is its genuinely intersectional approach. The book opens with the author’s visit to Seneca

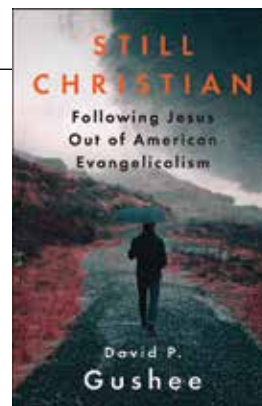
Falls, N.Y., the place where suffragist Susan B. Anthony lived and worked for the right to vote for women. Shirk juxtaposes Anthony’s accomplishments with her flaws, mainly her white supremacist version of feminism.

Recently in Christian circles, feminist clergy, lay people, and academics have been pointing

out the glaring absence of Christian women from Christian history and narrative. These champions of women often work to correct this by memorializing the theological voices of women who were present but rendered invisible in Christian life. *And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* takes this practice a step further by adding the voices of those who were not exclusively Christians into the narrative of American faith and spirituality.

Readers who enjoy spiritual memoir, little-known facts, and hearty doses of girl power will enjoy this volume. Shirk’s memorable prose and unique subject matter make this a valuable read. ■

Courtney Hall Lee (@CourtRhapsody) is a writer, attorney, and author of *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*.



Reviewed by Robert Wilson-Black

STORIES FROM THE KNIFE’S EDGE

Still Christian: Following Jesus Out of American Evangelicalism, by David P. Gushee. Westminster John Knox Press.

“THERE IS SOMETHING off-putting about a nonfiction story in which the I is infinitely more sinned against than sinning,” opines Phillip Lopate, the dean of nonfiction literature.

David Gushee’s autobiographical *Still Christian* may fall short in chronicling his own “sinning,” but this is ultimately redeemed by his self-reflective amusement at surviving the “skin of my teeth” narrative. After all, he notes that he is an ethicist who has “flexibility about convictions,” which is confession enough. As with many good books, the title masks a more accurate if less marketable headline. In Gushee’s case, it might be: “Still Baptist: A Southerner grapples with his diary.”

Gushee is an ethics professor at Mercer University, a church pastor, and the recently elected president of the American Academy of Religion. Reading this worthy extended essay on a Baptist life, I felt we were traveling together in an action movie where the hero barely escapes from an exploding planet. In Gushee’s story, those religious flames pushed us forward toward safety, merely scorching our heels, rather than pulling us backward into the lava-like funnels of religious fervor.

This was not Hollywood, however, but real life for Gushee and millions of us left orphaned by an originally capacious Southern Baptist planet that had, by 1993, imploded of its own weight. This ecclesial destruction revealed that the often-quoted Baptist ideal of “sole competency to interpret the scriptures” did not make room for the institutional continuity that “moderates” sought, but did allow for a fundamentalist (even neo-Calvinist) takeover.

For the tens of thousands of scholars, activists, and pastors who were forced into the vortex of the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist world in the 1970s and '80s, this book is a page-turner. The memoir includes many of the characters we loved, and some we learned to despise. When you ask a Southern Baptist of this era where they stood on the fundamentalist vs. moderate denominational divorce, you get the sense that shame falls on nearly everyone and victory on very few, and them unreflectively. Some of Gushee's chapters, though, are filled with shame when sometimes less is needed and victory when perhaps shame is called for.

At that time, for some moderate Baptists, it seemed Gushee enabled and fueled the theological fires that created harm, or at least did little to extinguish them. Which side was he really on? some wondered. Through his diary, full of deep reflection and some self-loathing, we learn that Gushee had the same question about himself.

Yet for others, Gushee's life is a story of public redemption exactly because he helped retrieve from that shameful fire thousands who needed a path out of a narrow fundamentalist Christianity. This story is not merely a Baptist one. Many who try to balance on a knife's edge of who is in and who is out of any religious group are often cut badly. Few survive the wound; Gushee shows us his scars up close, as a cautionary tale.

One can quibble with some nuances of Gushee's account. For instance, while it might be defensible from a fundamentalist perspective, describing Ron Sider, co-founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, as left leaning and anti-Christian-Right, even though Sider signed the Manhattan Declaration, a socially conservative theological manifesto, would be hard for many activists to swallow.

A cynic's summary of Gushee's travails could be "I was young. I needed the money. Academic jobs were scarce. I was merely a convert to this Baptist mess and just a professor. My mentors were better than my bosses. My diary reveals I'm better than my public stances. I did the right thing eventually." The realist's retort to such graceless accusations after reading *Still Christian*: "Welcome to the human condition, with which we all struggle. And thank you for telling us the truth about our lives." That's what good ethicists do.

Where would Baptist ethics be had David

Gushee sided with conservative Baptist leader Albert Mohler instead of moderates Glen Stassen, James McClendon Jr., Molly Marshall, and Diana Garland? Thankfully, we will never have to know. Gushee emerged to walk a different path. ■

Robert Wilson-Black is CEO of *Sojourners*.

Reviewed by Olivia Whitener

MISSIVES TOWARD A BETTER DAY

Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times, edited by Carolina De Robertis. Vintage Books.

"TO MY FELLOW writers and artists; to my fellow readers and lovers of art; to my fellow believers in peace and a more perfect world ..."

Thus begins Viet Thanh Nguyen's contribution to *Radical Hope*—"a collection of love letters in response to these political times." The Pulitzer Prize winner (for *The Sympathizer*) goes on to describe his dreams for a new model for our society, one that includes prophecies, poets, and the people: "Those of us who would tear down walls and eradicate borders, and who believe in both inclusion and equality, need to use our talents to help build a coalition."

The dozens of letters in *Radical Hope* illustrate the dreams of this diverse community of writers. Luis Alberto Urrea asks, "What if there is no *Other*? What if there is only *Us*?" Katie Kitamura writes of a future in which her daughter grows up believing in the generative power of language. Many of the writers pen poetic reflections on the beacons of light and love who have guided them, looking to the past to bring enlightenment into the next journey. In the final letter, Cristina García imagines the world seven generations from now, asking what that will look like and wishing upon her great-great-great-granddaughter "adventure and loving protection."

It is a powerful thing to read the dreams of others—though not uncommon in letters across the centuries. Letters from

James Baldwin, Martin Luther King Jr., and the apostle Paul are some of the most oft-quoted words of truth and power. Letters from prophets and loved ones can reassure or motivate, serve as lifelines and small pick-me-ups. I revisit letters from various stages of my life written by people I love when I need to feel connected across a distance.

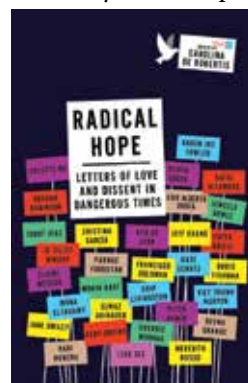
Despite a decline in frequent longhand correspondence, the enduring influence of the written word to portray emotion to another person is still evident, just via new platforms. Whether in letters to the editor, 280-character tweets, or WhatsApp messages across continents, we have created ever-evolving means of communication. But amid technological advancement and the threat of over-connectedness, the ancient form of letter writing holds its own. *Radical Hope* reminds us of the magic of the simple written word to transport us into the life of another. It continues a tradition of epistolary essays speaking truth to power, demanding a reply not in a written response but in civic action and care for our neighbors.

The editor, Carolina De Robertis, states her hope that the letters in this compila-

tion "will lift you, feed you, shake you awake, offer insight, and help you to feel less alone." Some, like Alicia Garza's tribute to Harriet Tubman, mimic prayer and are inherently soulful. Others are directives—to millennials, baby boomers, liberals, and feminists. All carry wisdom, honesty, and earnestness.

While commissioned at a specific moment in history, these letters speak across distance, experience, and time. Read as individual pieces, they each represent one story, one hope, one note of dissent. Presented together, they form a mosaic, a symphony of inspiration and motivation for action. Like my best-loved personal letters, I will revisit *Radical Hope* when I need to hear the story of another, to be reminded of the diverse community of saints together in this work for justice. ■

Olivia Whitener, a former editorial assistant of *Sojourners*, works for a nonprofit in Brooklyn.



MYTHS AND MIGRANTS

*Tisha M. Rajendra is associate professor of theological ethics at Loyola University Chicago. She discussed her new book, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Eerdmans), with Sojourners senior associate editor Julie Polter via email in November.*

Julie Polter: You write that inaccurate narratives about migrants—that they are freeloaders, criminals, and terrorists, or conversely always poor and vulnerable—lead us to ask the wrong questions and seek ineffective or damaging public policies. What is an example?

Tisha M. Rajendra: *False Narrative:* Migrants only come here because of a simple cost-benefit analysis—they can make more money here than at home. If we just increase the costs, they won't come, or if they are here without authorization, they will just return home. *A Wrong Question:* How do we reduce numbers of unauthorized border crossings and convince immigrants to stay in their own countries? *Resulting Bad Choice:* We treat them so badly—placing them in detention for months or years at a time—that they do not want to risk crossing the border.

What is the relationship between structures of sin and injustice and false narratives about migration? Our false narratives about migration support the structures of sin and injustice. For example, the false narrative I invoked above shields us from understanding how dependent our entire economy is upon the exploitation of undocumented labor. We don't think it could be exploitation since the undocumented are "choosing" to come here and work. But a system where people contribute to a society through their labor but reap none of the benefits of full membership can only be exploitative.

Why does history matter when it comes to immigration policy? The importance of history in migration cannot be overstated. Migration is not only

the result of poverty and unemployment—these factors must be "ignited" (in the words of migration theorist Saskia Sassen) by a certain kind of intervention from the host country. Some of these interventions, like colonialism, happened centuries ago; others, like foreign investment in factories,

happened decades ago, but without them, we wouldn't have mass labor migration.

Currently, the relationships between migrants and citizens are distorted by false narratives that the relationship is one where migrants are demanding goods and services that they have no right to. This is false. The relationships have their genesis in our own economic and foreign policies.

How can citizens "think about their relationships to various migrants in a way that illuminates rather than obscures their responsibilities" when it comes to undocumented workers?

Citizens can learn the history. Citizens can also reflect on the myriad ways that our lives depend on the labor of undocumented migrants. Who picks our vegetables? Who cleans our office buildings and homes? Often undocumented migrants fill these jobs.

What might solidarity with immigrants in the U.S. look like? In my book I argue that solidarity involves interrogating the false narratives and creating new narratives that more accurately reflect reality. Concrete practices of solidarity will, of course, differ from person to person, but one thing that is important for citizens to do is to challenge the false narratives wherever they see them. To that end, I hope that my book helps others recognize the false narratives and replace them with truer narratives. ■



Natalie Battaglia/Loyola Magazine

Imperial Power

Continued from Page 35

in the midst of Rome's empire. They contest the imperial status quo even as the language of God's reign/empire and its worldwide impact imitate imperial ways (Matthew 4:17, 12:28). His healings are signs or displays that embody God's transforming reign/empire in the present moment. They do not manifest the fullness of God's reign/empire yet, but anticipate this coming future.

What matters?

None of this provides a blueprint for sickness and healing in our contemporary setting. But it does suggest some implications for embodying the divine reign/empire in our present day.

One is the strong affirmation that healthy bodies matter. The gospel narrates the compassionate and merciful repair of some bodies to effect somatic well-being and wholeness.

A second implication recognizes psychosomatic and societal connections. Unjust and oppressive imperial structures, practices, and conditions impact the physical and mental well-being of their inhabitants. Sickness and healings are contextualized in larger societal visions. Attention to—and reform of—destructive societal structures matters.

Third is the issue of accessibility. The healing scenes in Matthew bring to the foreground folks who occupied social margins. Sick and disabled folks were at times mocked and not as valued as able-bodied folks who could contribute to households through work. Yet Jesus is accessible to heal anyone. Unlike other sources of healing, such as doctors or cultic sites or shrines (for example, those of Asclepius or Isis), Jesus' healings did not require the sick and caregivers to undertake lengthy and expensive travel to a sacred site. No one pays Jesus a premium for healing.

Fourth, this healing task is entrusted to—and continues through—Jesus' disciples (10:7-8).

The healings in Matthew's gospel were somatic, material, physical, and societal. By employing a "now and not yet" perspective, the gospel does not guarantee universal healing; nor does it render healing a normative expectation for the present. However, our present times do offer much unfinished, divine work, for the healing of bodies and nations. ■

Warren Carter is professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School and coauthor, with Amy-Jill Levine, of The New Testament: Methods and Meanings.

Light and Shadow

THIS MONTH SEES several liturgical transitions. Epiphany, the season of light and revelation, comes to a close. Jesus' transfiguration is its own epiphany. The church enters the season of Lent, beginning with a focus on human frailty and failure—and for many people an evening (or week) of indulgence in things that bring joy, pleasure, and sweetness. The light is still there, but we are peering more intently at the shadows.

The opening prayer for Ash Wednesday in *The Book of Common Prayer* begins, "Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent." The readings for the first week present the God whose power and splendor in creation is only matched by her care for her children. The radiance of the transfiguration also shines a light on the ways in which we are not like Jesus, yet he chooses to leave the mount of illumination and return to the world that needs his light. The readings for the third week attend to the world God has made, calling us to care for it in partnership with God. And on the final Sunday, Jesus teaches about his death and resurrection, the greatest transition in the scriptures.



God's faithful love and care demonstrated through the gift of creation and through the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus are beacons that light the way through these transitions, and those in this world and our own lives. We remember that we are earth and to earth we shall return. In between is light and shadow.

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[FEBRUARY 4]

A World Restored

Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

GOD IS WORTHY of our praise. That is the testimony of the psalmist who crafted Psalm 147. God is gracious, a restorer rebuilding that which is broken, gatherer of the world's outcasts, mender of broken hearts, healer of sorrows ("wounds" in verse 3), and cares for the downtrodden in verses 2, 3, and 6. This is one of the most comforting portraits of God in scripture. God is worthy of our praise and trust and able to bear and transform the ruptures in our souls and in the world.

This portrait of the God who gathers, heals, and restores is made all the more poignant by the reference to Jerusalem and outcasts of Israel (verse 2). That language strongly suggests the psalm be read in light of the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C.E., the most devastating event in Israel's history to that time. Even if the psalm is set after a different conflict, the psalmist is praising God for a restoration that is not yet manifest. Her world is still broken.

The psalmist has read God's resumé in

creation. God determined the number and names of the stars. God clothed the heaven with clouds and waters the earth, tending to the thirst of the earth, and providing food even for unclean animals. God's praiseworthiness is demonstrated in faithfulness as well as in power. In a world riven by conflict within and between individuals, communities, and nations, and between humanity and the earth itself, this psalm offers a vision of a world restored, no matter how deep the ruptures.

[FEBRUARY 11]

Light of God

2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6;
2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

GOD IS LIGHT. Each lesson for Transfiguration Sunday reveals divine light: the chariot of fire in 2 Kings 2:11, "God shines forth" in Psalm 50:2, the light of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4, and the

transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:2.

In each, God's glory touches the earth. Elijah ascends bodily into heaven on heaven's own fire chariot. In the psalm, God's glory shines from Zion here on earth, Jerusalem. In the epistle, the glory of God shines forth from the face of Christ. In the gospel, Jesus not only walks the earth as the embodiment of God's glory, but also reveals a glimpse of that glory in his transfiguration.

The worlds in which these texts are set include brutal wars, occupation, colonization, slavery, financial exploitation, and interpersonal violence. And yet God chooses to dwell among her people, accompanying them through the perils of a very broken world. These texts testify to God's presence in *our* world as well; we are every bit as broken and God is every bit as present. In a world deluged by floods, shaken by architectural and economic collapses, and bruised by violence between persons and nations, the enduring presence and undimmed glory of God is a beacon of hope and comfort.

Liturgically speaking, the transfiguration is the predecessor to Lent. Jesus and the disciples will leave the mountain and its glory behind and descend into the brokenness of the world to live out their callings just as the church heeds the call to Lenten disciplines amid the troubles of the world.

[FEBRUARY 18]

Covenant Partners

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10;
1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

NOAH AND GOD made a covenant (Genesis 9) that is binding on us today. We are partners in it with all creation. The covenant between God and Noah is not just with Noah or he and his immediate family, but also with all his descendants—and with every living creature on earth represented by the animals on the ark. It does not end with the passing of that generation. This text is a lesson in ecology, teaching we are all responsible for safeguarding creation, in partnership with creation.

Of the two groups—humans and the rest of creation—it is clear that it is humans who are out of sync with creation, leaving lasting, often irreversible devastation in



A man prays during an early-morning wildfire, fueled by high winds and dry conditions, that ignited north of Los Angeles in December.

our wake. Nature's destruction, from predation to earthquakes and whirling storms, often balance the natural equation even when human property and possessions are devastated.

Nature's fury is terrifying. We are terrified in its face and traumatized in its wake. Our biblical ancestors, like other ancient humans, looked to the skies through which lightening shot as though from a bow and saw in the arc of the rainbow the template for a divine weapon. In Genesis, the weapon of divine warfare becomes the sign of a promise of survival. The rabbis believed that Noah's ark and this cosmic covenant gestured toward the Ark of the Covenant, as both arks would safeguard the people of God.

It will still storm and flood. But we as a species will survive. Unless, perhaps, our survival depends on our care of the earth.

[FEBRUARY 25]

Son of Woman

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31;
Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

WHILE THERE MAY be some speculation about the identity, and hence nature, of Jesus' father, there is generally none about his mother, the fully human Palestinian Jewish young Miriam called Mary. Mark 8:31-38 presents the human and divine aspects of Jesus' natures. He is fully incarnate here, mortal and immortal: Son of Woman.

Jesus is also living fully in the shadow of his impending death. There is perhaps nothing more truly human. He teaches his disciples that he will certainly die and suffer along the way and—in the same breath—that he will rise again on the third day, all in the same verse (Mark 8:31). Christians often rush to the resurrection, neglect the

The psalmist has read God's résumé in creation.

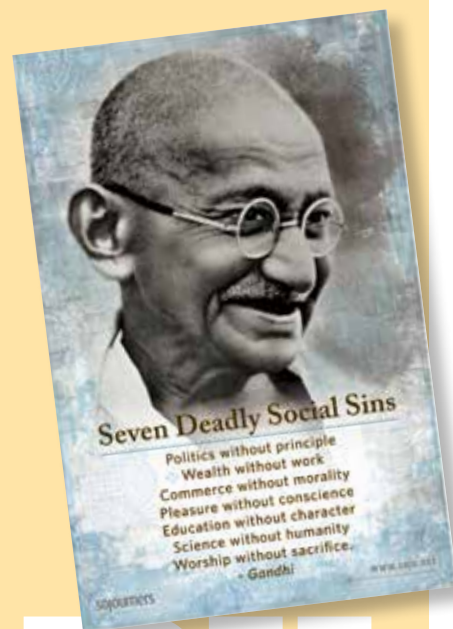
crucifixion, and avoid at almost all costs the period that Jesus lay dead. The season of Lent bids us sit at the foot of the cross and in the shadow of the tomb.

It is not just Jesus' death that we shrink from. Death may be our constant companion and most frequent one, but she is an unwelcome one. Many don't plan for their deaths or those of their dear ones and don't talk about death, sometimes not even at funerals. Lent provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our own mortality.

We, like Jesus, are woman-born. And we, like him, shall die. Jesus calls us to follow in this life-space between birth and death. It is in our shared humanity that we are called by the Son of Woman. Jesus bids us follow and live in the knowledge of the certainty of our deaths. ■

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A Visit to the Home of Jerry Falwell Jr.

Jerry Falwell Jr.: Jesus Christ!

Jesus: I'm going to assume that's not an expletive.

Falwell: No, that would be Jesus *H.* Christ, which I would never use.

Jesus: Good. He's a cousin on my mother's side, and I'm *still* ticked at my aunt for that.

Falwell: But you're HERE! In my own house! It's the Rapture, the Second Coming! And you're taking me home to my reward! PRAISE THE LORD! Just let me throw a few things in a suitcase and we'll ...

Jesus: Relax, and put down your shaving kit. This is not the Second Coming. It's more like a check-in.

Falwell: It's not the end times?

Jesus: No [looking at his watch], not even close.

Falwell: But it's so gratifying you've chosen to reveal yourself to me! It confirms that my good works have been recognized and recorded in



straight, Lord, just as God intended at the creation. God made man and then took a rib to make a wife of the opposite sex and a completely different gender, and then they got married like normal people who ...

Jesus: Please stop talking.

Falwell:

Jesus: I want to discuss this gun fetish of yours, Mr. Falwell. Did you in fact say the following: "If more good people had concealed-carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in and killed them."

Falwell: ... uhm ... How did you know about that? Oh right, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me."

Jesus: Actually, I Googled it. But setting aside your horrible sentence structure—you'd need a backhoe to dig out that modifier—I admit I don't expect much from a man continuing his father's conservative orthodoxy posing as biblical principle. You people in the Bible Belt keep asking, "What would Jesus do?" despite the fact I made that pretty clear a couple thousand years ago: Serve the poor, love your neighbor, welcome the stranger ...

Falwell: Whoa! You sound like that Rachel Maddow gal.

Jesus: Although I get to the point much faster than she does. (*Just say it's the Russians, already!*) But my point here is that your false piety

has become excruciating. You claim to live by your faith, but you give only lip service to its basic tenets. You wouldn't turn the other cheek unless it was to take better aim. You care more about guns than about the poor or needy.

Falwell: Well, if the poor and needy would just ...

Jesus: If you say "bootstraps," I swear I'll turn you into a pig. I'm totally not kidding.

Falwell:

Jesus: Look, if you must be cloying and sanctimonious, don't drag my name into it. God wants no part of your big mouth or narrow mind. And just because the media considers you a "Christian leader," do NOT think it's some kind of divine reward.

Falwell: Of course not. My real reward won't come until I reach those pearly gates, where the streets are made of gold, and ...

Jesus: Just stop. Heaven is not a gated community, and golden streets get slippery when it rains. Which is why we had them replaced with ... that's not important. This is: Remember what I said in the gospel of Matthew.

Falwell: You mean, "Cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"? Now that's tough love.

Jesus: No. I mean the Beatitudes.

Falwell: ... the Whatitudes?

Jesus: Just look it up. And stop thinking the Second Amendment is one of the Ten Commandments.

Falwell: It's not?

Jesus: Start making pig noises, Mr. Falwell. It will ease the transition. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

When Jesus stops by, look busy.

the Lamb's Book of Life, where the names of all the righteous are ...

Jesus: Actually, we use Excel now, and if your name is in there, it's with an asterisk, Mr. Falwell.

Falwell: An asterisk for "extra special," I hope, since I have a personal relationship with you, and I've been saved and baptized with full-body immersion, not with sprinkles. (Although I *do* like them on ice cream. Also gummy bears.) And you can call me Jerry.

Jesus: Calm down, "Jerry." I'm not here to talk about your salvation, just to set you straight.

Falwell: I assure you I'm *totally*

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